

Subject: Lemmon Sisters : 'What Was Mama Doin'?

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Lemmon Sisters Bring Magic Back

Musical show is a tribute to the wartime heroes of another era

The Lemmon Sisters paid tribute to the Year of the War Bride in fine form @ Showplace yesterday afternoon and evening, sharing stories and songs of turbulent times of trial, tragedy and triumph. The talented trio (Rosemary Buchanan, Valerie Clements, and Jeanette Sanderson) wove their seamless harmonies around a fabric of recollections provided by a dozen women who lived and loved their early years against the backdrop of a world at war; taking up the tools of the war machine and combining their talents and efforts 'That Men May Fly'. Ottawa based writer Trudy Chapman assisted in making these women's voices (on tape) blend with the trio's on-stage presence to accomplish a remarkable retrospective that was both cabaret and serious homage to the sacrifices made by a previous generation in the attempt to ensure the possibility of 'peace ever after' (to quote the lyric of White Cliffs of Dover).

The program opened with remarks and introduction by President Una Golding of Legion Branch 452 and the presentation of a combined colour guard consisting of Army, Navy and Air Cadets; taps and a moment's silence followed by reveille, and then the show began to swing! The echoes of the big band era were evoked and embellished to great effect by a talented quintet consisting of bandleader Rob Phillips on keys with a crack rhythm section anchored by Curtis Cronkwright on drums and Richard Simkins on double bass. Mike Graham's smooth guitar lines allowed Carrie Chesnutt's saxophones and flute to approximate an entire horn section, including the trumpet groove for 'Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy'. The classic tunes flowed and the sound in Showplace was excellent. Poppies were worn over hearts on stage and all hearts were joined in service to the songs. Mike Graham stepped out to solo on the vocal to 'A Nightingale Sang in Berkely Square'; looking quite dapper with only a microphone in hand and displaying another side of our multi-instrumentalist jazzman. An excellent 'little big band'.

The Lemmon Sisters sure know how to squeeze the soul of a song to sweet effect. Whether taking turns in the solo spotlight or layering harmony to present as one, the vocals were top drawer throughout the evening.

Program notes suggest that many tunes are arranged for the trio by Brent Turner, and the evening allowed for over twenty songs in two sets (with voice-overs and commentary) in two hours, intermission included. Well paced and well

received by an interesting cross section of audience. Inquiries at intermission suggested that the matinee was even better attended, with folks bussing in from out of town. This was a fine and professional production from the ground up, (the Lemmon Sisters stunningly attired in gowns by Howard Berry of Peterborough, pink, then black for set two) and one would assume that it could do very well as a touring show or enjoy a run in a major city venue. Recordings of the program made at the National Arts Centre last year were moving briskly at intermission. (more info @ www.lemmonsisters.com)

The evening evoked poignant memories for one and all; and though I was pretty familiar with most of the material from my own parent's gatherings and record collection I was particularly impressed with the inclusion of 'Last Night I had the Strangest Dream'; a song that I have always attributed to the pen of Pete Seeger, a pacifist/activist and environmental guardian who holds a hero's place in my heart, along with the women and men that gave so much that we might indeed live in the hope of 'Peace Ever After', eventually. Lest we forget.

The program closed with the Lemmon Sisters inviting Gwen Brown to the stage as representative of the war brides that contributed their stories to the project for a rousing rendition of 'We'll Meet Again'. Thanks, mama; for doin' what you did. Thanks, Lemmon Sisters; for bringin' it all back home.