

By Don Heckman

The population of female jazz vocal artists has been growing faster over the past decade than a California wildfire. But with far more appealing results. And among the most appealing of all are the singing and piano playing of Carol Welsman. She may not be the best known blonde jazz singer from Canada - at least not yet. But when it comes to sheer talent, she doesn't have to take second place to anyone.



Carol Welsman

Welsman's performance at Vibrato Grill... Jazz in Bel Air Tuesday night was a case in point. Despite the distractions of a somewhat talkier than usual crowd, her two sets were striking displays of creative versatility, reaching from blues and balladry to bossa nova, vocalese, and classic standards.

All of which provided a lot of choices from a musical table filled with appetizing dishes. One of Welsman's current projects is an album of Peggy Lee classics, and she included a briskly swinging "Why Don't You Do Right?" along with a darkly intimate rendering of "Black Coffee" capturing the full, caffeine-driven intensity of the song's poignant tale.

Scat singing can be - for this listener - studies in boring, white key meandering. But Welsman, in "Just One of Those Things," "Lady Be Good" and "Cottontail," ripped off choruses - often in league with parallel piano clusters - with the harmonic accuracy and the ineffable swing of the instrumentalist that she is. And she dug into the vocalese of the latter two - especially Jon Hendrick's tongue-twisting lyrics for "Cottontail" - with a fluency that belied the Byzantine difficulties of the lyrical/melodic lines.

The most satisfying entrees in Welsman's musical feast, however, were the ballads, which, like the balance of the program, roved across time and style. Jimmy Webb's "By the Time I Get To Phoenix," for example, emerged as a stunning jazz ballad. Rodgers and Hart's "Where Or When" revealed Welsman's way with a lyric via phrasing that perfectly combined the story of the song with the flow of the music. And, in Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's touching "The Folks Who Live On the Hill," she brought utter musical believability to that rarity - an American Songbook standard that's *not* about unrequited love (and that also accomplishes the unlikely lyric feat of rhyming "veranda" with "command a").

Despite a few audio problems throughout the night, Welsman was backed with swing, efficiency and total empathy by guitarist Pat Kelley, bassist Rene Camacho and drummer Jimmy Branley.

Call it a musical night to remember. But even so, leaving Vibrato's elegant environs, I couldn't help but wonder why - despite her long list of accomplishments - Welsman still hasn't made the big breakthrough, still hasn't reached the wide audience that her talent so obviously deserves. It's time. And hopefully soon.

So don't miss the opportunity to hear Carol Welsman up close and personal this weekend at the [Radisson Hotel](#) Los Angeles Westside, 6161 W. Centinela Ave., Culver City. Information: [In-House Music](#).

To sample Carol Welsman's recordings, click [here](#).