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Voce di meche

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Tuesday, December 16, 2014

THE FIFTH EDITION



Joshua Breitzer, Joshua Jeremiah, Ben Bliss, Olivia Betzen, Alex Mansoori, Wallis Giunta and John Brancy

Last night marked the fifth edition of Steven Blier's annual Christmas treat as part of the "Sing for Your Supper--NYFOS Hours" series hosted by the affable Henry at the eponymous friendly and comfortable Upper West Side restaurant. These singing evenings always have a theme and the theme for the December show is (trumpet fanfare) "A Goyishe Christmas to you and your family: Songs by Jewish Composers".

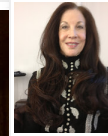
The beloved Steven Blier serves as pianist, arranger and *raconteur*, regaling the appreciative audience with anecdotes and gossip about the composers, in this case many Jewish composers who had changed their names. For example, Frank Loesser composed "Baby It's Cold Outside" to sing with his wife; the song was picked up for the show *Neptune's Daughter* and the couple

The song was performed by mezzo-soprano Wallis Giunta and baritone John Brancy and we feel as if we actually heard it for the first time. All the seduction lay in the voice and gestures; it seemed as if it were a scene in a film. If this pair is not opera's next glamour couple we will eat our program!

Rémy Yulzari joined them on the double bass and also accompanied Ms. Giunta in her lovely solo "What Are You Doing New Year's Eve" also by Loesser. His bass playing equalled the expressiveness of her singing. The instrument fairly spoke. Or sang.

Mr. Brancy also had a solo--he sang "O Holy Night" by Adolphe Adam (possibly Jewish but evidence is contradictory) in both English and French; his voice has such a wealth of expressiveness behind it that we were moved close to tears. He also provided

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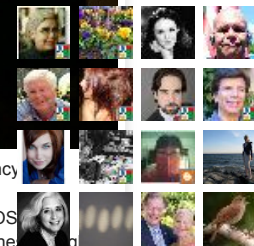
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an encore later in the evening--"I'll Be Home For Christmas".

Mr. Blier is fond of gender bending and "Winter Wonderland" was given a new slant, performed by Mr. Brancy and Joshua Jeremiah, accompanied by clarinetist Alan Kay. The cosy pair in their winter hats had the audience in stitches, especially when they were pretending the snowman was Parson Brown.

Even more gender bending was enjoyed when excellent tenor Ben Bliss (just seen at The Metropolitan Opera in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) sang one of the songs made famous by Eartha Kitt--"Santa Baby", written by Joan Javits in the 50's. Here it was called "Santa Buddy" with appropriate rewriting of the Christmas list.

There was humor aplenty in the course of the program. Joshua Jeremiah was hilarious in "Candle in My Window", also known as "God Bless the Christmas Jew" by Levitsky and Miller. He has an expansive way of getting a song across as we noted in his duet with Cantor Joshua Breitzer--"Hannukah in Santa Monica", a Tom Lehrer song filled with his customary wit. They were accompanied by Mr. Kay who surely has a Klezmer background.

Cantor Breitzer regaled the audience with a Yiddish version of "Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer". Even if we didn't understand the words we enjoyed the sound of the language and the spirit of fun. Mr. Kay and Mr. Yulzari accompanied.

Alex Mansoori contributed yet more fun to the evening with David Friedman's very funny "My Simple Christmas Wish" to which he gave a most theatrical delivery. He also showed another side in "Silver Bells" (Jay Livingston/Ray Evans) which, as explained by Mr. Blier, refers to the Salvation Army collecting money for the less fortunate. Now that's something we did not know and perhaps neither did you.

The entire group, joined by Olivia Betzen opened and closed the program with ensemble arrangements of "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" and Irving Berlin's "White Christmas" involving some lovely humming in harmony. There was also a jolly encore of "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree". Let it be noted that the English diction was excellent. We would not have wanted to miss a single word.

It was a fine show leaving the audience happy as can be. Too bad we must wait a year for the next edition.

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