

Jazz great will play in Omaha

Marilyn Maye will perform Frank Sinatra hits in tribute at Joslyn

By CHRISTOPHER HEINE
Staff writer

Jazz icon Ella Fitzgerald once said that singer Marilyn Maye was "the greatest white female singer in the world."

Johnny Carson called Maye "Supersinger" and invited her to perform a vocalist's-record 76 times while host of "The Tonight Show."

The singer is famous among her generation for her first hit single "Cabaret" and another hit, "Let a Winner Lead the Way," which dominated Lincoln Mercury car television ads in the 1970s.

This weekend, the internationally renowned singer will perform only an hour down the road at Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum, 2200 Dodge St., on Saturday in its Witherspoon Concert Hall.

Maye, who has performed in Omaha several times in the past, said the Witherspoon was "a wonderful theater." "It's just magical in there," she said from Dallas on Monday. "I do really hope a lot of people come because it will be such a super evening."

Maye's 6 p.m. cabaret performance will pay tribute to arguably the greatest male white singer of all time - Frank Sinatra. "Her Way: A Tribute to

Sinatra," will showcase Maye crooning 47 of the late singer's favorites arranged in a five-medley, two-hour show.

"They are timeless standards in the tradition of American pop music," Maye said. "And they'll still be there long after rap has given up."

The song list includes Ol' Blue Eyes' standards such as "The Lady is a Tramp," "It Was a Very Good Year" and "My Way."

Sinatra and Maye never formally met, but he once took time to catch her at the legendary Las Vegas hotel, The Riviera.

She said the two, despite a gender difference, had similarities in vocal approach.

"I think a good part of why this performance is working is that I'm a woman, and people don't expect that," she said. "But he and I both treat lyrics as the reverent, most important part of a song. The song should be sung to tell a story."

Maye started performing "Her Way" last September in Kansas City, Mo., with 13 shows sold out in advance.

Carol Keller, president of "Joslyn After Hours," was inspired to bring Maye to Omaha by one of those performances.

"She was just fantastic," Keller said. "There wasn't a slow moment in

Concert Preview The Facts

Who: Marilyn Maye
Where: Joslyn Museum's Witherspoon Theater at 2200 Dodge St. in Omaha
When: Saturday at 6 p.m.
Cost: \$31.80 for main floor tickets, \$15.90 for balcony and \$75 for patron seats
The Skinny: Renowned Jazz legend to be in Omaha

the show. She sings with such emotion that she leaves you hanging on every word."

The cabaret singer lives just outside of Kansas City in Lenexa, Kan., and has plenty of Nebraska ties. For instance, Andy Hill of Lincoln has been her bass player for 16 years.

Not to mention that Maye's numerous Omaha performances, which garnered her many friends.

Two of her favorites, sadly, have recently passed away.

One was Omaha furniture-store queen and cultural icon of the American dream, Ruth Blumkin.

Maye said the Russian-Jewish immigrant known as "Mrs. B" used to come to the singer's performances at the now-defunct Club 89.

"I once dedicated a song to her called 'Yiddisha Mama,' and she broke down and cried," she said.

The other person she'll miss this weekend is long-time personal friend Lee Bevilacqua. He was well-known in the Omaha community as head athletic trainer at Creighton University, a position he held for many years.

Maye said Bevilacqua was a serious fan of hers, and of traditional jazz vocalists in general. He flew to several of her performances around the United States, she said.

"I guess I'll be dedicating the show to two great Italian men, Lee and Frank Sinatra," Maye said.

Proceeds from the show will go to the Joslyn Museum. Seating begins at 5 p.m. with cash-bar cocktails offered at the fountain court.

Maye has recorded seven albums and 34 singles for RCA Records. Keller said the singer's experience and international stature made the show unique for her organization.

"We've never done anything like this," she said.

Keller didn't sound as if she thought hard-core Sinatra fans would be disappointed.

"She is like a female Frank Sinatra," Keller said. "It's very moving because of her emotion and the fact that everyone knows all the songs."

Film gets twist from local group

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thesizer and various percussion and wind instruments will accompany the dancers and film.

To preserve an improvisational element, the dancers have seen the film only once, and they have not practiced yet with the quartet, nor have they worn their fluorescent makeup.

"I would call (Howlooseation members) hardcore improvisationalists," Perry said.

The combination of four media - film, music, dance and theater - makes the project interesting, in addition to the fact that those media are combined to mesh with a pre-existing piece of work, she said. "I'm personally very interested in collaborating and finding different ways to work with people in a kind of nonhierarchical way."

"I think experimentation is always a good thing."

And with a black-and-white, expressionist film, blacklights, fluorescent makeup and improvisational, avant-garde music, "Der Golem 1999" is made to order.

Local group sponsors charity

By JEFF RANDALL
Senior staff writer

If you're a good Catholic, you observe religious holidays. But if you're a really good Catholic, you might let Fat Tuesday pass you by.

Fat Tuesday, the last day before the traditional beginning of Lent and the annual Lenten fast, is one of the most notorious and hedonistic of holidays - particularly when celebrated New Orleans-style.

But Lincoln isn't New Orleans, and for potential party-goers who don't have time for an 18-hour drive, the Zoo Bar and social group, the Hobnobbers, are offering a tamer alternative to the bayou version of Mardi Gras.

Tonight, the Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14th street, will be transformed into a micro-

cosm of the French Quarter with all the food, drink and music one would expect from the Crescent City.

The music is being provided by Big Chef Zydeco, a four-piece Lincoln band that employs the accordion and vocals in both French and English. Food will arrive courtesy of Charlie's Seafood and Grill, Crane River, George's Red Pepper Grill and Russ' Market.

But unlike the chest-and-crotch-baring revelers of New Orleans, all the party people at the Zoo Bar will be getting down for a good cause.

This Fat Tuesday hoe-down was organized by Hobnobbers, a philanthropic and social networking organization with more than 100 members. The event will benefit Project Youth, a sports program that places low-income children in softball and basketball pro-

Concert Preview The Facts

Who: Fat Tuesday Celebration
Where: Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14th St.
When: Tonight, 5:30
Cost: \$3 cover charge
The Skinny: Music and food will help move Mardi Gras north

grams. The evening's festivities will kick off with food being served at about 5:30, and the Zoo Bar will collect a \$3 cover at 6:30 p.m. for the show. All proceeds from the cover charge and food sales will go toward Project Youth.

Blues sons play own sound at Zoo Bar

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Boehmer said. Little Slim commented that he didn't really have an interest in blues music before that.

He nodded in agreement over the dark wooden table as Manthey said, "It took watching corn grow to start playing guitar."

"It made me understand how it was supposed to be played," Little Slim said. He added that Lincoln definitely had a musical scene, and a rich one.

Several years ago Little Slim and Jeff Boehmer first played in a band together at Duggan's Pub during open-mic nights, where Lincoln residents first saw the two play.

In those days Boehmer exploded with an energy that seemed to come from the wild hair shooting straight out his roots. He shook the neck of that guitar until the chords hummed with what can only be described as peaceful anarchy. Little Slim echoed that charismatic flow and engaged the smaller audience of Duggan's Pub.

About a year and a half ago, the band, with Larson and Manthey, began to jam together. What they knew of each other in childhood began to emerge in the music they played. "Blues is so much of a feeling, when you know the people you're playing with" - Boehmer pauses as he tries to express himself - "when you know what (the band) is feeling, when you are all focusing on the same thing, it

clicks." This is the childhood experience, coupled with the maturing musicians, that the Lincoln blues scene raised.

Today they show a patience in learning, they realize there are textbooks to study, as Boehmer said, but only to learn textbook-type stuff. Little Slim and the Back Alley Blues Band plays what cannot be captured on paper.

They take the blues and break it down to the simplest element, and begin to break it down from that, Larson said, but they never really practice how they're going to play.

"Spontaneous," Manthey said. "We improvise."

The band disperses from the relative seclusion of the back table and slowly begins to thread its way to the stage.

Boehmer makes some final adjustments to the amp and the bass guitar. He has cut his hair to a short trim. While Larson picks up the drum sticks, splintered in the middle, Manthey steps up to the microphone.

With a touch of joking pomp, Manthey introduces Little Slim, who is leaning against the wall, waiting for this introduction.

Swinging his jacket over his shoulder, he takes the Zoo Bar stage, the same stage that his father, Magic Slim, took before him and the same stage that Boehmer's father built 25 years ago.

They play this evening with a sound that is purely Lincoln. They sound good; they sound tight; they play

together as they always have.

As they begin the set with "Shame," a beat permeates the room, energizing the crowd. They play with the same enthusiasm Larry Boehmer and Morris Holt have showed for more than 25 years.

They show a respect for the blues, and a respect for their forefathers.

"Even though we have that respect, we're still trying to find our own style," Boehmer said at the end of the night, "We do it on our own."

The band still teaches itself to set its own mark. To watch the members mature is to watch Lincoln's music scene grow. The sound they choose, the music they perform, is a recipe gleaned from the musical appetites of Lincoln.

They play the blues, the way the blues sounds in Lincoln - hot, with an energy that drives deep into your chest until you, like the band, must explode in a beautiful outburst. They play the blues as they did through high school.

Tonight they play before a larger crowd than all the high school parties and impromptu jams combined.

Tonight they are "the epitome of American youth: guitar players, blues and freedom," Manthey said at the evening's beginning, and it is this same emotion that flows across the room.

Tomorrow they go back to their day jobs, the printing jobs, the pizza delivery jobs, the cleaning jobs and classes, but tonight they sing the blues to the beat of their own rhythm.

It does sound so fine.

BEANIE WEENIES

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