

Jazz Singers on Church St.

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By Calvin Barr



Music, particularly that which incites nostalgia, is inherently powerful and versatile. It heightens our experiences, and can inspire us in the least expected ways. On Sunday, I went to the 120 Diner, a chic, laid-back bar, restaurant, and stage nestled in the heart of Church St. I'd come to see a friend sing, without knowing much about the event. When I got there, he introduced me to his voice coach, **Bella Canto**, a classically trained jazz musician, and the director of the show. What she

and her team had orchestrated for the evening left no feeling unfelt. Canto and her group performed a set list of timeless jazz classics that ranged from smoldering hot to butter-cream-frosting sweet, with raw emotion that kept the room transfixed all evening. What made the show wonderful wasn't just the exquisite vocals, or the swinging strings and keyboard, but the clear objective to connect with audience.

With or without the front row experience, Canto's stage presence and vocal style is uncannily personable, yet dazzling. Her romantic repertoire included melodiously exposed renditions of "At Last," later followed by Victor Young's "When I Fall in Love." In other solos, she brought tears of laughter with Gershwin's "Blah, Blah, Blah," delicate soothing with his "Summertime," and genuine chills with an unbridled delivery of "Hallelujah."

Just as impressive were the accompanying musicians, **Kathleen Gorman** on piano, and **Brendan Davis** on bass. Gorman is an impressive vocalist in her own right, and performed "I Can See Clearly Now" and her own, "Brand New Day." Meanwhile, Davis, performed a number of superb, high-energy bass-line solos, notably in a sultry performance of "Fever."

Finally came the performances by the **Fortems**, a community-based choir for trans men and gender queer individuals. In their debut public performance as a group, they gave a splendidly swanky rendition of "Fly Me to the Moon," as well as a tremendously beautiful "What a Wonderful World."

[Link to the original](#)

Later on, it fully clicked what had made the evening so special, apart from the talent of the performing individuals. There's a unique condition in which the act of making music isn't explicitly about describing a story, a feeling, or anything else. Before performing "Over the Rainbow," with a haunting vibrato, I've never heard from anyone other than Judy herself, Bella soberly addressed the heartbreaking events that transpired in Orlando earlier that day. "There is good that comes out of this," she said, "it's that it brings us together."

Sometimes, we can't help questioning where the good in the world went. This evening was a reminder that it doesn't disappear. It is wherever we come together, listen together, and take each other's hands.