

Review:

AMERICAN POPULAR SONG SOCIETY PRESENTS SIDNEY MYER at The Cutting Room Lifetime Achievement Award Gala Celebration/Benefit

By: Andrew Poretz

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Sidney Myer, a beloved performer and the longtime booker of Don't Tell Mama, was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the American Popular Song Society (APSS) at their annual Gala Celebration and Benefit at The Cutting Room on June 15. Previous APSS Galas had tickets available even on the same day, but for Sidney (we can't possibly call him "Myer" here), it was sold out weeks in advance, and was the hottest ticket in town. The Cutting Room was filled with cabaret stars "and other people" (to borrow from Jim Caruso) who would not miss this for the world.

Produced by APSS President Linda Amiel Burns and Glen Charlow, the event was hosted by musical director and pianist Michael Lavine. Bassist Michael O'Brien was on hand throughout the evening. This writer was seated directly behind/next to Sidney, where it was impossible not to see his gleeful reactions and frequent tears.

A spectacular video montage (see it below the article) by Michael Lee Stever showed stills and rare video of a young Sidney, long before he had completely developed his sui generis manner and exquisite timing - he can say nothing more than "Good evening" and own the room.

Sue Matsuki was first up, with "Everybody Sing" (Nacio Herb Brown/Arthur Freed). The line "Everybody's gay, everybody's gay!", which had a different meaning in 1938, evoked much laughter from the cabaret crowd. Like many performers that evening, she told the story of getting her start thanks to Sidney's encouragement at Don't Tell Mama.

Jeff Harnar sang the words, "I was never fond of Sidney Myer," and walked off the stage, only to return with a funny, sweet and adorable parody lyric to the tune of "Rosie."

Tanya Moberly, who also books at Don't Tell Mama and is a fine performer, told a couple of swell, moving stories before launching into the very appropriate "Cabaret" (John Kander/Fred Ebb).

Frank Dain was excellent with his beautiful, emotional interpretation of "I'll Be Easy to Find" (Bart Howard).

The legendary Marilyn Maye, accompanied by David Pearl, delivered warm words and a funny song parody she wrote. At the incredible age of 98, she still sings better than many singers half her age.

Young cabaret singer Ethan Mathias, newly 17 and now possessing a rich and rangy baritone, provided a lovely version of Sondheim's "Not While I'm Around."

Throwback performer Bryce Edwards, with his ukulele, performed "Help! (The Girls Are After Me)," a 1925 novelty song by Al Sherman and Owen Murphy that is reminiscent of the Eddie Cantor hit "Ma! She's Making Eyes At Me." Edwards included his Cliff Edwards-style "eefing."

Richard Skipper told a marvelous story of performing as Carol Channing at the Bistro Awards when Sidney's mom turned to Sidney and said, "She's still got it... but she's starting to show her age." Skipper performed a fine "World, Take Me Back" (Jerry Herman).

Soprano Renee Katz performed a sweet "You and I" (Leslie Bricusse).

Steven Brinberg, a well-known Streisand impersonator but appearing here without makeup or costume, told several great stories, particularly one where Liza Minnelli showed up for her show at Don't Tell Mama. Brinberg performed a version of "People" (Jule Syne, Bob Merrill) with special lyrics, as in "People who need Sidney." The lyrics were funny and clever, and if you close your eyes, you could almost think it was Streisand slumming it at The Cutting Room.

Charles Busch, himself a former female impersonator, was moving in his story and his brilliant performance of Noel Coward's "If Love Were All," accompanied by Jono Mainelli. Busch has exquisite timing, phrasing and emotive ability that elevated this song greatly.

Carolyn Montgomery, accompanied by Jon Weber, performed a special song, "Here's to Sid," to the tune of "Here's to Life" (Artie Butler).

Pianist and singer Ricky Ritzel told a funny story about meeting Sidney in the early 80s at the original Panache, where Sidney got his start, before performing a poignant and timely "Boy, Do We Need It Now" (Charles Strouse/Martin Charnin, from *Upstairs at O'Neil's*).

Tracy Stark, one of Sidney's many "closest friends" and his frequent accompanist, in a show highlight, played and sang a modified version of Peter Allen's stunning "Quiet Please, There's a Lady on Stage," changing "Lady" to "Sidney." (The song was inspired by Allen's note to rude patrons at a Julie Wilson performance).

Stark also accompanied Lennie Watts, who noted that he and Sidney both “opened and closed three cabaret rooms.” Though many performers threw in a line or two of Sidney Myer impressions, Watts became Sidney for nearly half of the song, taking on Sidney’s voice and mannerisms perfectly, to Sidney’s delight.

Jazz and cabaret great Nicolas King, once a child star on Broadway, got his start in cabaret rooms at the age of 12 when he came to Don’t Tell Mama with his grandmother (Angela Bacari), and proposed getting a night at the venue. “Darling, have four,” Sidney replied, with King also doing a Sidney impression. With Stark, King recreated a song he first performed at that early engagement 23 years ago, “Johnny One Note” (Richard Rodgers/Lorenz Hart), and, as usual, killed.

Broadway and cabaret star Karen Akers, in excellent voice, performed a gorgeous “Fun to Be Fooled” (Harold Arlen/Ira Gershwin), accompanied by Alex Rybeck.

Rybeck stayed up for another Broadway and cabaret star, Lee Roy Reams, for “Old Friend” (Nancy Ford/Gretchen Cryer), a song that for Reams, expressed his “decades of memories” of a long friendship with Sidney. Reams was in spectacular voice.

Mark William performed “The Music That Makes Me Dance” (Jule Styne/Bob Merrill), accompanied by Matt Lowy. He sang with a surprisingly deeper voice than the last time this writer heard him sing a couple of years ago, sounding closer to Dick Haymes than a young Sinatra. (“I’m more confident,” he explained after the show.)

Proving vaudeville isn’t just for Bryce Edwards, the irrepressible song and dance man Mark Nadler took to the piano for a comedic duet with KT Sullivan, “Catch Our Act at the Met” (Jule Styne/Betty Comden and Adolph Green). They brought the house down with this bit.

Famed composer David Friedman and his husband, Shawn Moninger, performed Friedman’s “We Live on Borrowed Time,” a song written for Laurie Beechman and first recorded by Nancy LaMott.

The energetic and fast-talking Sirius/XM radio personality, the pianist Seth Rudetsky, told some great Sidney Myer memories before closing out the performances with the surprising and perhaps overly long choice of Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue.”

Linda Amiel Burns at long last presented the award to an emotionally overwhelmed Sidney, who gave a pitch-perfect acceptance speech thanking many people, particularly his late parents, and his partner, videographer Michael Lee Stever (“whom I waited a lifetime to meet”).

This extraordinary night was a most-satisfying Lifetime Achievement Awards event. Kudos to the APSS for pulling this off.

Photos: Andrew Poretz

Learn more about the APSS on their website at www.apssinc.org