



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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Supporting live theatre in South Australia

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MICHELLE AND THE GENTLEMEN'S CLUB - MORE MEN!

Michelle Pearson

Jade Monkey
15 March 2015

Review by Anthony Vawser

Michelle Pearson is just about everything you could ask for in a cabaret entertainer. She sings superbly, looks stunning, and radiates charm, while her stage patter is cheerful and warm, with amusing family stories that are told (and colourfully impersonated) with confidence and, thankfully, expressing a world-view with far more pragmatism than preciousness.

Her observations and introductions zero in on targets that hit boldly (and admirably) close to home. She reflects on the pleasures and changes that love can bring - as well as the challenges of adversity - and is impressively frank about her family, friends, and youthful adventures.

The four-piece Gentlemen's Club is a supple musical unit, with electronic keyboard work particularly impressive at times in managing to evoke an acoustic piano. Supportive but never overwhelming, they make an ideal accompaniment to Miss Pearson's soulful voice.

"Hold the Line" is an unexpected but pleasantly up-beat start to her show that has one imagining how stratospherically well this song could have sold in its day if Michelle Pearson, rather than Bobby Kimball, had been the lead singer of Toto. James Brown's "It's a Man's Man's Man's World" is given a sultry spin that tones down the angry edge of Renee Geyer's rendition but is no less impressive.

"Too Much Love Ain't Enough Love" is a lesser-known Jimmy Barnes gem that Pearson's superb arrangement makes shine (and smoulder) like it should; the guitar solo here is a nice touch. Barnes gets revisited with "Stone Cold", seemingly a curious choice to pay tribute to her partner with, but while Pearson leaves you in little doubt that she means every word, sincerely and romantically, it's still a struggle - for this reviewer, at least - to accept the song in the way that she intends.

Later in the program, Pearson draws further from the well of iconic Aussie male singer/songwriters, making Farnsy's "Burn For You" still sound like an evergreen, elemental classic when delivered in touchingly understated fashion by the singer with only her guitarist for accompaniment. She has a commendable ability to select songs that feel familiar without ever letting them come out sounding stale.

The moody, slow-burning "Wicked Game" is a brave inclusion, especially with its extended introduction - one that a small number of arrogantly chatty audience members presumably felt wasn't initially worthy of their complete attention...more fool them. Sustaining this song for its complete length would seem like a tough task, but Pearson knows exactly what she's doing, and it becomes a brilliant, standout showcase of her talents.

Her re-imagining of Melissa Manchester's solemnly sentimental "Don't Cry Out Loud" is cheekily subversive indeed! Even if you don't personally know the individual whom the newly humorous lyrics are targeting, she certainly makes you feel like you do! A similarly unexpected personal touch is brought to Sade's "Smooth Operator", and it's another quirky example of Pearson's sly humour that marks her out as more than just another great looker with a great voice.



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As a tribute to her ill father, the audience is treated to a finale of his favourite song, "I Will Always Love You"...The singer's capacity to simply retain her composure in such circumstances would be impressive in itself, but the performance she delivers goes beyond stirring and into breath-taking territory - and still she is able to gently joke with her audience about not wishing to send them home suicidal!

The fact that Pearson introduces her encore (and one of this reviewer's favourite songs since about the age of six) - Ian Moss' "Tucker's Daughter" - almost apologetically as an obscure title is just one more reason to love her. It is also a clear symptom of her own potentially unfashionable love for Australian music and her apparent desire to be seen as an authentically, unpretentiously Australian performer, with no reason to resort to the role-playing of so many European-influenced cabaret artists in this country.

Technically, Michelle Pearson is virtually flawless in her vocal phrasing and tone. She displays impressive individual taste in her choice of material, and shows a skilful comic flair. She has no need for pretence or overt razzle-dazzle. She is clearly comfortable and happy when on stage, and she communicates a great deal of that comfort and joy to her audience. The Adelaide cabaret scene is richer for her presence.

Rating: 4 stars (out of 5)