

## Nevada Pops "Under the [Jazz] Lights"

September 4, 2009 • UNLV Artemis Ham Hall • By Frank Leone

Conductor Dick McGee launched the Nevada Pops season opener concert; "Under the Lights," September 4th, at UNLV's Artemis Ham Hall. The program was a selection of pops and jazz classics like South Rampart Street Parade, Mancini's Peter Gunn Theme, Gershwin songs, and the original 1924 Ferde Grofé orchestration for the Paul Whiteman Orchestra with George Gershwin piano soloist, of the *Rhapsody In Blue*, in an unequaled piano performance and interpretation by Scott Holshouser. An unusual breath of the unusual was provided by the *Hot Club of Las Vegas*, led by Chris Davis and Mundo Juillerat, featuring the gorgeous vocals of the beautiful former *Mamma Mia* star, Carol Linnea Johnson. This is a most respectful tribute ensemble, performing jazz in the manner of the historic *Hot Club of France*, begun by Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli. Their artistry in improvisation and the precision of the ensemble was pure pleasure for the ears, a stylistic excursion in the realm of the famous gypsy guitarist's jazz.

The band concert was peppered by many jazz solos faithful to each particular jazz style per the selections, with outstanding improvisational contributions by Fred Haller, Bob Scann, Tom Ehlen, Tom Wright and others. Jim Belk on drums was the driving force, locked in step with solid bassist, Brace Phillips, and brilliant pianist, Ron Simone.

An absolute highlight was Rocky Lombardo's flugelhorn on Calvin Custer's arrangement of the Gershwin classic, "Embraceable You." Rocky was featured front and center on stage, and amidst an ever engaging background of keen orchestration and ingenious reharmonization, he delivered a solo of absolute beauty, characterized by its invention, delivered with stunning melodic lyricism.

Dick McGee conducted skillfully, and provided entertaining comment and excellent anecdotal material for all selections, and is to be commended for his great efforts in this field for many years. Though not the type of concert normally reviewed, this concert provided outstanding jazz in so many aspects so as not to go ignored.

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