

FUSION

Cal Pops brings alive the Big Band sounds of yesteryear

Glenn Miller, Cole Porter, Ozzie Nelson celebrated by Palo Alto-based orchestra

BY TONY LACY-THOMPSON
For *The Daily News*

If we turned on our big, tube-powered radio in 1940, when it warmed up, we would hear music from Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Jimmy Dorsey and the like. Big bands, swing music and torch singers. Well at the Flint Center in Cupertino on Sunday, the California Pops Orchestra, conducted by Kim Venaas took us back in time to that Big Band era.

The Pops Orchestra doesn't normally have a large brass contingent, or a singer, but for this event was joined by The Black Tie Jazz Big Band and Carly Honfi. The Black Tie Jazz Big Band has played from hotel ballrooms to Davies Symphony Hall, and Honfi has appeared in a multitude of musical theater productions across the Bay Area, so all qualifications were in order for a good afternoon's music.

The show started with "American Patrol" from Glenn Miller, and "I've Got You under My Skin" from Cole Porter. And although the band was starting to warm up, the appearance of Carly Honfi in a shimmering silver dress moved the tem-



Sam Huie / California Pops

perature up a couple of degrees. She sang Nat King Cole's "This Can't Be Love" with the California Pops on Sept. 17.

perature up a couple of degrees. She sang Nat King Cole's "This Can't Be Love," and had the men in the audience swooning.

It was interesting to note that many of the songs had originally been written and performed in the 1930s, but had been

MUSIC REVIEW

Who: California Pops and Black Tie orchestras

What: Big Band show

When: Sept. 17

Where: Flint Center, Cupertino

Artist website: <http://calpops.org/>

revived many times over by the likes of Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, and others. A case in point being the lovely "Dream A Little Dream of Me." Originally performed in 1931 by Ozzie Nelson, the song had more than 60 versions before becoming a big hit for The Mamas and The Papas in 1968. Honfi did a fine job with it.

Orchestras tend to be an aural rather than visual experience. So in this case it was good to see drummer Carlos Almeida front and center. While not exactly Keith Moon, he was animated in quite a few of the numbers and was ably assisted by David Dieni and Eric Grothkopp on percussion and timpani. I waited with baited breath to watch someone pound those big kettle drums.

Honfi did a fabulous job on Nat King Cole's "Too Close for Comfort" which has the lovely line "One thing leads to another, too late to run for cover." Any

excuse for a dress change, Honfi treated us with something appropriate for Johnny Mercer's "Tangerine." The orchestra threw in a couple of good medleys and I especially enjoyed the one based around Henry Mancini's arrangement of "Cherokee," with tunes from Count Basie, Duke Ellington and others. Almeida was finally allowed to break into a drum solo, much appreciated by the audience.

Venaas explained that the Pops orchestra takes requests, but the strangest one to date was for Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. He didn't think the requester quite understood the word "Pops," but he decided to oblige anyway, and the orchestra launched into a swing version of the Fifth, "mashed up" with Beethoven's Ninth. I wonder what Ludwig would have thought?

To wrap up, Honfi gave us a smoky rendition of Nat Cole's "Unforgettable," and the orchestra finished off the afternoon, as they had started it, with a Glenn Miller tune that everyone knew, the truly unforgettable "In The Mood."

Flint Center was more than three-quarters full, which shows that Big Band music can still draw a crowd. We are grateful to Venaas and Cal Pops for keeping this music alive and kicking.

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