

Monheit struts into Madison, better than ever

By LINDSAY CHRISTIANS | lchristians@madison.com | Posted: Saturday, October 24, 2009 9:00 am

From her opening notes to the final strains of "Hit the Road to Dreamland," Jane Monheit showed Madison what it takes to own a song.

Monheit serenaded the Wisconsin Union Theater on Friday with a smattering of jazz standards: a Gershwin tune here, a Berlin classic there. Throughout, Monheit exuded the confidence and charisma of a seasoned performer.

She strutted. She strode. She grinned and waved offstage to her 17-month-old son, Jack, who occasionally contributed his own voice from the wings.

She was utterly charming.

The majority of the songs in Monheit's set were warmly familiar, like the Hoagy Carmichael classic, "Stradust," and the delightful Lambert, Hendricks and Ross tune "Twisted."

Neal Miner, the bassist, arranged many of the tunes into fully integrated ensemble pieces, though I got the sense that this trio could've taken random requests from the audience and sounded equally polished.

Monheit had a youthful energy, interrupting an introduction to exclaim that she loves when people recognize a song just from the introduction. She had a natural between-song patter, relaying jokes from the band and gushing about songwriters.

"I chatter onstage, that's all I do," she laughed. "I need a talk show. A jazz talk show. That would last."

But despite her girlish giggles and digressions, Monheit's voice had a mature, sophisticated sound. Her vocal strength came from dynamics, not speed, shifting into a deeper tone even within the same note. She eschewed the lightning-fast scat acrobatics of some jazz performers, using improvisation only in fills and transitions.

Monheit played with the rhythms and melodies on the cooking "Cheek to Cheek," which she zipped through at a faster clip than most dancers would like. "That's All," dedicated to her little boy, was gorgeous and soulful, and I loved her playful, nimble take on "Taking a Chance on Love" from her 2004 album of the same name.

Some of the evening's best moments came in Monheit's duets with pianist Michael Kanan, who also played a Fender Rhodes. "It's a Lovely Day Today," by Irving Berlin, took on a rich depth with Monheit's careful additions.

Monheit shone on some South American melodies, including a fine version (in English) of the Brazilian standard "Waters of March" and a tight Ivan Lins tune off "Surrender," a 2007 album she called her favorite. Sometimes Monheit got melodramatic, but that voice, coated in caramel, effortlessly smooth, sold every note.

Only occasionally did Monheit's diction fail her; "Twisted" would've been confusing for new listeners. Also, I would've loved more solo work from the excellent drummer, Rick Montalbano, who got only brief moments to himself. (He is also Monheit's husband.)

But when Monheit stalked onto the stage in shiny black heels and a lovely green halter dress and launched into "Get Out of Town" by Cole Porter, she exuded the kind of confidence that sweeps an audience off its feet.

I've often complained about sound and lighting in the Union Theater. Well, this time they got it right. The sound quality and balance were well-pitched, highlighting the performers without distracting.

Monheit isn't sure what her next album will be -- "I'm too busy being a mommy for that," she said. Whatever it is, I hope it will include the kind of soul she brought on Friday to her soft, poignant version of "The Rainbow Connection" and "Over the Rainbow."

They were truly, as the first song promised, "better than ever."

The New York Times

January 23, 2009

MUSIC REVIEW | JANE MONHEIT

Going Beyond Standards to Thoughtful Storytelling

By STEPHEN HOLDEN

Jane Monheit, a singer who is still finding her place in the pop-jazz continuum, obviously loves to sing. Performing material from her new album, “The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me” (Concord Records), with a trio on Wednesday evening, she wallowed in the sensuality of her cool, seductive voice. Throwing back her head, she ran her hands through her thick hair and along her thighs as though she were taking a bubble bath and the bars of music were bars of luxury soap. The show’s apogee of dreaminess, an attenuated “Lucky to Be Me,” stretched that Leonard Bernstein melody into a lazy afternoon.

It wasn’t long ago that Ms. Monheit was hyperbolically touted as a sexy jazz wunderkind, the singer most likely to succeed Diana Krall, but it hasn’t quite turned out that way. The onetime princess in waiting is still a star in waiting. Married to her regular drummer, Rick Montalbano, she is now a 31-year-old mother of a young son.

Her new album, which nudges her gently in a pop direction, includes a slow-burning rendition of the Corinne Bailey Rae hit “Like a Star,” with her own velvet touch. The even sexier Fiona Apple ballad “Slow Like Honey,” also included on the album, was unfortunately omitted from the show.

The challenge facing Ms. Monheit has always been to do more than make an enticingly lovely sound. Until the new album, she was content to sing standards and let the texture of her voice and her facility at disconnected scat improvisation do the work. But there were signs on Wednesday of an emerging thoughtfulness with regard to lyrics. The nascent storyteller in Ms. Monheit came out of hiding in “Something Cool,” a classic jazz ballad in which a fantasist deep in her cups regales a stranger in a bar with possibly invented stories of her days as the belle of the ball. It is a song that cries out to be treated as a Tennessee Williams monologue, and many have done so. If Ms. Monheit’s version shied away from becoming a Blanche DuBois impersonation, she imbued it with a poised wistfulness that showed she had given the lyrics serious thought.

Equally promising was “I Do It for Your Love,” Paul Simon’s dour portrait of marital passive-aggression and tedium as a couple meekly go through the motions of togetherness. Once upon a time, Ms. Monheit might have treated it as just another love song to be sweetly crooned. On Wednesday, its anomie registered.

Jane Monheit performs through Feb. 7 at Feinstein’s at Loews Regency, 540 Park Avenue, at 61st Street, (212) 339-4095, feinsteinsattheregency.com.



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Posted on Mon, Sep. 21, 2009

Jane Monheit: Elegant, retro jazz vocalist

By A.D. Amorosi

For The Inquirer

When Jane Monheit released her first album in 2000, it was an auspicious start to the 21st century and the role of the new female jazz singer. Claudia Acuña, Katie Melua, and the poppier Norah Jones debuted around the same time, but none had Monheit's elegance and ability to phrase in such unique and stately fashion within the jazz canon.

Often tagged a retro jazz classicist, Monheit had poise, clarity, and control with a strange natural sense of voicing. The manner in which she parsed each syllable - these were influences you couldn't always define; a little springy Anita O'Day here, some smoky Anita Baker there.

Nine years later, in front of a packed house Saturday at the Annenberg Center, Monheit, 31, was no less impressive or dynamic a singer, even if some of the mystery in her music gave way to something more manifest.

This recently minted mom (her husband is her band's drummer, Rick Montalbano) and dark-haired New York beauty talked much about her family's new addition in connection to her set list, and her happiness also seeped into her songs.

"Lucky to Be Me" was sweet-toned, while "That's All" featured a cutesy arrangement and a prancing vocal.

Yet, even when things threatened to get saccharine, her voice thrilled. The way she flattened and held her R's during "That's All" and "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea" was mighty and precocious.

During Ivan Linn's "No Tomorrow," Monheit toyed with the Brazilian melody's placid arrangements in low silken tones.

Her playfulness did not end there. After dedicating Hoagy Carmichael's "Stardust" to Upper Darby's

Joel Dorn - the late, legendary producer who released her first few albums - Monheit and pianist Michael Kanan spit-shined the shopworn classic into something buoyant and bright, with her waltzing phrasing leading their charge.

And though the world may not need another rendition of "Over the Rainbow," Monheit and her band saved the day by tying it to an absolutely lovely, even stoic, version of "The Rainbow Connection" - a Muppet-themed enterprise whose cool childishness was welcome.

Find this article at:

http://www.philly.com/inquirer/magazine/20090921_Jane_Monheit__Elegant__retro_jazz_vocalist.html

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News

Hartford Courant Feature on Jane Monheit

July 30, 2009; Owen McNally for the Hartford Courant. Jane Monheit, 31 And Post-Baby, Is Enjoying The Maturing Of Her Career. Image. Vocalist Jane Monheit's robust, irreverent sense of humor — especially crisp and candid when mocking sexual stereotypes in the music biz — might surprise enraptured fans who envision her solely as a gorgeous, dulcet-toned diva, a divine sex symbol who also happens to sing like an angel.

One of the jazz world's great storybook successes of the 21st century, Monheit, who's now 31 and a first-time mom, tells The Courant she never really was comfortable being groomed and mass-marketed as a "jazz princess" after her debut album, "Never Never Land," became an instant success in 2000.

Monheit, the headliner for the Litchfield Jazz Festival's opening night Friday at 9:15, experienced her first taste of what would become a feast of public acclaim in 1998 when, at only 20, she won the first runner-up prize at the Theloniou Monk Institute Vocal Competition. Early in her career, before morphing into a glittering, globe-trotting superstar, the young singer, still a promising work-in-progress, was transfixing audiences in Connecticut.

In 2001, a breakout year for her career, she made a dazzling appearance at opening night of the Litchfield Jazz Festival, as the warm-up act for the legendary Danbury-based Dave Brubeck.

Many thought the new kid had outshone even a fine performance by the world-renowned Brubeck.

Elsewhere, however, not all was hearts and flowers for the emerging sweetheart of jazz.

Along with a loud chorus of hosannas from a mostly enthusiastic press, Monheit simultaneously was savaged by a handful of zealous critics who argued that she was too young, naive and far too pretty to be considered "an authentic jazz singer."

Her privileged, happy childhood in a pleasant Long Island suburb seemed far too idyllic, too untortured by the agony and angst that apparently all "authentic" jazz singers must have.

Contrary to her detractors, Monheit has honed a knack for getting inside the meaning of a song's lyrics, even interpreting melancholic love ballads lamenting heartache and brooding tragedies that she acknowledges she never really has experienced.

In numerous early appearances in Connecticut, whether in her striking debuts at Litchfield or at New Haven's Shubert Theater, her riveting rendition of "Over the Rainbow" made strong men and women tear up. On her very next selection, whether it was a chic but cheeky romp through "Cheek to Cheek," or a slick, swift swim through the verbally shark-infested lyrics of "Waters of March," Monheit, a model of versatility, swung hard, recalling her greatest childhood idol, Ella Fitzgerald.

The singer, who's schooled in music theory, has a new disc out, "The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me" (Concord). Its selections are divided between hip, intimate jazz pieces and lushly arranged romantic ballads.



She'll be backed Friday night by her road band, featuring her husband, drummer Rick Montalbano, pianist Michael Kanan and bassist Neal Miner.

But the big news in her life — transcending all else, she says — is the birth of her son, Jack, on May 9, 2008, and her happy home life in their lakefront home in Rome, N.Y.

In a telephone interview, it's apparent that for Monheit, all roads lead to Rome and little Jack, and that motherhood changes everything.

Q: How has becoming a mom affected you?

A: It's the best thing that ever happened to me. Every wonderful thing that everybody says about motherhood is true.

Q: How do you and your husband, Rick, manage your careers now with a baby on board?

A: We just take Jack, who's now 14 months old, everywhere we go on the road. Jack's been all over the world with us, and even celebrated his first birthday in Taipei. He's been to Europe twice, Japan once and all over [the United States](#). He's already got more stamps on his passport than most adults.

Q: But this must be a real balancing act, especially on the road?

A: We have a friend who travels with us and watches Jack when Ricky and I are both on stage. There's a lot to do on the road, of course, dealing with the press, traveling and tending to stupid things I have to do, like my stupid hair. I actually have to worry about looking nice when I'm on the road, at least when I'm onstage. I'm hardly the glamour puss that I used to be. Well, when I'm performing on stage, I have to be. But offstage, no way!

Q: Does Rick pitch in with the dad duties?

A: Oh, man, he's amazing. I had a C-section. So I didn't even change Jack's diapers until he was three days old. Ricky did it all, and pitches right in.

Q: You were college sweethearts at [Manhattan School of Music](#), right? How did you meet, through music?

A: We played together at a rehearsal, and he just spotted me and said, "That's for me!" and totally pursued me. That had never happened to me before. I was always like a frumpy nerd, the weird theater girl in high school, wearing something that none of the other kids would wear, like red lipstick. ... So boys thought, "Well, that girl is weird and scary." But Ricky just totally pursued me, and I was like, "What is up with this unbelievably gorgeous, talented boy staring at me and hovering around me with his glasses off?" We just fell in love when we were 20 and have been together for almost 12 years.

Q: Do you feel that you've been stereotyped in the business because of being a beautiful, young woman at the expense of recognition of your musical talent, training and knowledge?

A: I think that used to happen. But I don't think it will anymore because I'm over 30, have had a baby and am not like a little sex kitten anymore. Well, I was never a little sex kitten. I was more like a voluptuous sex kitten. I don't see myself that way anymore. ... Believe me, I will never put down my false eyelashes and stilettos. I'm always going to be like a glamorous, sexy woman. But I'm not just this little young thing anymore. I'm proud of being an adult woman and a mother, and I'd like that to be what I'm represented as now. Like all the fuss in the studio with somebody there saying, "Make her look young. Make her look young." Oh, my God. Stuff that, please! That can just go away.

Q: Thirty-one is not actually ancient, you know?

A: No, it's not in the real world. But in this business, it is, unfortunately.

Q: How do you deal with people in the business who treat you that way?

A: If there's a problem, I just don't work with them again. But that happens less and less.

Q: Does the experience of being a mom have any impact on the way you sing or on your stage persona?

A: Yes. I'm so much freer onstage, now that I've had a baby. Once you have a child, that's the most important thing in your life by far. Work now is just a job, so I'm going to enjoy it. It's not like the world's going to end if I take a solo and sing a bad note. And now I just say whatever the hell I want between songs.

Q: It sounds very liberating.

A: Early in my career, there was a lot of pressure to be a perfect jazz princess and be in my gowns and my red lipstick and to act a certain scripted way. I was even told once that I needed to act aloof onstage because that's what attracts the audience. Now I'm just like, "Screw it!" In real life, I'm really talkative and like to be funny and make people laugh. Now, some people are saying, "You're talking too much on stage." I just say, "I'm having fun. They're laughing. So what's the problem?"

• [THE LITCHFIELD JAZZ FESTIVAL](#) runs Friday through Sunday at [Kent School](#) in Kent. Tickets are \$35 (lawn) and \$55 (tent) a day. Three-day passes are available for \$195 for tent seating; a three-day VIP pass for \$350 includes front seats in the tent, preferred parking and the Friday-night gala. A Friday-only VIP pass is \$150..

Jazz singer Jane Monheit feels no need to cross over into pop

By Rashod D. Ollison

March 4, 2009

There's a smile in Jane Monheit's voice as Jack, her 9-month-old baby, coos in the background. This feeling of contentment also suffuses the jazz singer's latest album, *The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me* -- all this despite the consistent, slightly annoying push from her label to go more pop. "Somehow people think I'm gonna be this big pop crossover," says Monheit, who headlines Rams Head Tavern in Annapolis on Friday night. She stops a beat before adding: "I don't see that working."

But the compromise she reached with Concord, her recording home for the past two years, serves her well on the new CD. In addition to interpreting tried-and-true chestnuts such as "Get Out of Town" and "Lucky to Be Me," Monheit pours her luxuriant, honeyed vocals over tunes by contemporary songsmiths. Lyrics from the pens of Corinne Bailey Rae ("Like a Star"), Fiona Apple ("Slow Like Honey") and even Paul Simon ("I Do It for Your Love") are given new shades and meanings on *The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me*. The title comes from a line in "The Rainbow Connection," which closes the languorous 13-song set.

"When we made this album, there was a little looking for tunes," says Monheit, recently calling from Los Angeles. "Usually, the songs come to me naturally over time. They're usually songs we've been working on onstage. This one, well, was totally weird. The first half was straight-ahead jazz tunes. I was pregnant, and then I had my son and went back to record the second half." That was when her label pushed her to include more contemporary tunes. "I feel like it's better to sing a song I'm excited about instead of being told to find something new and sing those," says the artist, 30. "But it ended up working, because I had wanted to do new singer-songwriter songs anyway -- just not on this album."

Despite Monheit's initial trepidation, the mix of songs works well. The subtlety and sparsity of the arrangements, overseen by Matt Pierson, provides ample room for the singer's interpretive skills. Her approach has become more assured and relaxed since her emergence on the scene nearly a decade ago. Monheit says her marriage and especially her pregnancy played a major role in the deepening of her style. "Being pregnant was the happiest moment in my life," says the native New Yorker. "Knowing I was gonna meet my son in a couple of weeks inspired these songs, like 'I'm Glad There Is You' and 'Rainbow Connection.' Those hormones did magic for me."

Her rich voice, vibrant with shades of early Barbra Streisand, has always stood out. She wasn't even old enough to enter a bar when she won first runner-up at the 1998 Thelonious Monk Institute Vocal Competition. (Tragic jazz star Teri Thornton took the top prize and died two years later.) Monheit's debut, *Never Never Land*, was released in 2000 and impressed jazz circles. What she lacked in emotional authenticity at the time, Monheit made up with her flawless tone and laserlike pitch. The push for a Diana Krall-like pop crossover started about the time her fourth album, *Taking a Chance on Love*, hit the streets. But despite having the voice, the looks and the material, Monheit has failed to reach gold and platinum sales. But she isn't worried about such things.

"I'm a jazz musician. I'm not concerned about fame and fortune or how many records I sell," the singer says. "I want to put on good shows and be a better musician. I [couldn't] care less about what critics say and how I should be categorized. I get to support myself and my family just singing -- and that's a wonderful thing in this day and age." *See Jane Monheit at Rams Head Tavern, 33 West St. in Annapolis, at 8:30 Friday night. Tickets are \$35. Go to ramsheadtavern.com or call 410-268-4545.*

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Los Angeles Times

June 9, 2007

JAZZ REVIEW

Whether singing in English or Portuguese, Jane Monheit is the real deal.

By Don Heckman
Special to The Times

June 7, 2007

JANE MONHEIT can do just about anything she chooses, musically. Blessed with an extraordinarily warm and supple voice, perfect pitch, inventive musicality and an insightful approach to storytelling, she has the capacity to express herself convincingly in virtually any area of the music world.

What she's chosen - this far, at least - is jazz. And her performance Tuesday at Catalina Bar & Grill offered plenty of reasons why fans of the genre can be pleased that she's done so. It also underscored the jazz roots of her singing. Monheit has been criticized, unjustly, for the clarity and the focus of her music, for a perceived absence of the rough edges that are presumed necessary in authentic jazz vocalizing.

But the upbeat rhythms Monheit brought to a hard-romping version of "All or Nothing at All," the mastery of the tricky vocalese maze of "Twisted," her jaunty way with the bop phrasing of "Robbins' Nest" were the work of a creative imagination with an intuitive feeling of what jazz is all about.

And she did more. Singing in Portuguese, she offered a convincing take on Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Soinha de Ser Com Voce," followed by a quick-paced, witty version of his "Waters of March," sung in English and Portuguese. Her stunningly lyrical renderings of "Moon River" and "The Shining Sea" were enhanced by dynamic contrasts rarely used by jazz performers.

Did she do it all with consummate musical precision? Yes. Did that precision in any way diminish either the emotional effect or the jazz essence of Monheit's art? No. And her spontaneous interaction with her first-rate band - featuring sterling solo work from pianist Michael Kanan, tenor saxophonist Ari Ambrose and guitarist Miles Okazaki - further emphasized the fact that Monheit is the real jazz deal.