



Ida County Courier

by Christine Wiese

Some really sweet jazz emanated from the Clausen Center in Holstein on Valentine's Day. The Jaimee Paul and Leif Shires' Quintet came on stage and brought a host of hopes and dreams with them. What a revelation.

It was definitely not an evening redolent of candy hearts and the attendant overdose of red roses. What they offered up was more like the aroma of rich dark chocolate spiced with the heady scent of white carnations.

Paul's voice is simply amazing. A person would swear her lungs went all the way down to her knees. There aren't many who can hold a note as true and as long as she can. Amazing, too, were the interpretations she and Shires gave to revered jazz standards.

It was to be expected that they would play "My Funny Valentine" but to have this plaintive cry of love layered over Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" was near genius. The strains from Shires' trumpet flowed like long silken strands of golden honey. Paul's vocals took on a timbre of dark molasses laced with a splash of Cointreau. The result was an electric fusion of epic proportions.

There were lots more happy surprises.

"My Favorite Things" morphed from a song composed to chase away a child's fears to a triumph of hope over despair. The way Paul sang them, the words could have been a woman singing to an absent lover or maybe just to herself all alone in a big empty room. Whatever it was, it was magic.

So was "Summertime" from Porgy and Bess. Under the quintet's sure and able hand, it became a hymn of joy rather than a symphony of sadness.

Then came "People Get Ready" which ended the first set and left the audience eager for more. They were not disappointed in the second half. Shires came back on and prefaced two instrumentals with his grandfather's words, "A physician can heal the body but a musician can heal the soul." It would seem he was right. When the guys played "Blue Skies", a sense of pure contentment settled over the audience and quiet smiles appeared.

"Hernando's Hideaway" was a gas from start to finish. You just can't beat a great vocalist when she's backed up by a sweet muted trumpet. It's even better when the piano is on a roll; the drums are pulsating; and the bass is banging away. "Sent by Joe"? You bet.

"At Last" made famous by Etta James had to have been the acme of the evening. Paul metaphorically tore her heart out and handed it to the crowd. As the French say, it was magnifique! Music with a capital M.

"Awesome" is a term that has been so overused of late that it has come dangerously near to deteriorating into irrelevance. Not this time and not with this group. They most assuredly have first dibs on the word.