



Russ Lorensen

Benedetto/Blessed

A Tribute to the Life and Music of Tony Bennett

The Hideaway Room @ Helen's



Since Russ Lorensen turned his attentions from theater musicals to cabaret, he's made quite a splash. He quickly caught the attention of critics with his initial show, *A Little Travelin' Music*, cut a CD with that title for LML Music, and less than six months later delivered a second CD, *What I Want for Christmas*, to music shops.

Lorensen brought his follow-up show, *Benedetto/Blessed*, a tribute to Tony Bennett, to The Hideaway Room @ Helen's, opening it with a series of quick film clips of cabaret's iron man. The opening medley of four Bennett hits foretold a problem, however, and as many of the numbers that followed revealed a need for greater differentiation and individuality.

Lorensen's voice is lighter than Bennett's, but warm and engaging, essentially a satisfying instrument for the genre of songs dear to the heart of Bennett fans. He also is personable. Still, with Lorensen's undeniably attractive qualities, the show's focus on Bennett proved a detour. Yes, the songs were good and details culled from Bennett's biography were interesting, but in his desire to communicate the essence of Bennett, Lorensen's own identity remained submerged.

Especially after a gentle and endearing rendition of *It Amazes Me*, we speculated how more interesting it would be to discover Lorensen's own approach to the mix of standards, pop and jazz he favors: his personal interpretations of them unfettered by ties to the one who got them on the charts.

Jazz musician Kelly Park, who traveled east with Lorensen, provided rhythmic and appropriately subdued arrangements for his piano plus a bass and drums. Shane Mathews was technical director.

Peter Leavy

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