

**Christmas crooning with Russ Lorenson and friends**

December 23, 2009

By Robert Sokol, SF Showbiz Examiner

There's a generous spirit that surrounds Russ Lorenson and it's not just the holiday season! Ask him about his show tonight at The Razz Room and he is effusive with praise about his co-stars, his musicians, the material. He even begins to riff about performing colleagues doing other shows in which he's made recent guest appearances. It's all supportively superlative and somehow refreshing in what can often be a "but enough about me, now let's talk about me" industry.

Lorenson has been on the scene for several years in San Francisco and other cabaret and jazz meccas. He's received raves for his shows tributing the likes of Tony Bennett and enjoys the unofficial mantle of Mr. Cabaret Christmas. "I guess I am," he laughs. "There's lots of Christmas shows in cabaret, though here in San Francisco they tend to be a little more offbeat. It's great that the folks at The Razz Room seem to have made me a part of their annual tradition. We're already talking about next year!"



Tonight's show was born out of an album of holiday songs Lorenson recorded in 2006. "Usually you have a show and then you do an album based on it. This time I had an album people liked and then I had to build a show from it. There were always guest stars," he says of the early participation of local favorites like Terese Genecco, Barry Lloyd and Alexandra Kaprelian.

That team toured the original show but are now working gigs in New York and Los Angeles. "This year is the first time I'm doing it with new guests and we've had to rearrange duets and other elements. It's taken on more of a jazz flavor," he says. "Jonathan Poretz is a great jazz singer and has portrayed Frank Sinatra in a touring show. He also just did a big show at Yoshi's. Suzanna Smith appears regularly at jazz spots like Shanghai 1930 and Savannah Jazz."

Carly Ozard, who's been garnering attention for comedic musical efforts like ***Bitter and Be Gay*** and the upcoming ***Bewitched, Bothered and Bi-polar***, rounds out the group. "She's our token cabaret person," Lorenson jokes. She's got a great song from ***Nuncrackers*** and I don't really want to have to follow her on stage because she's got that big, brassy personality that will really make the number pop. On the flip side, she's singing 'O Holy Night' in that gorgeous opera voice she has, so it will be a nice contrast."

Annual shows must evolve and Lorenson has some new treats in store. "We found a great song called 'Mrs. Claus' by Candy Forest, a local composer, and Nancy Schimmel. It's a great bluesy number from the perspective of Santa's wife but now I'm doing it so they were kind enough to let me make some minor adjustments."

He scours resources like older LPs, iTunes and YouTube clips for gems. "If you don't do the religious songs you're left with Rudolph and Frosty. Some of those are fine, but there's lots of winter time and holiday songs that people don't hear as often. I like the sort of songs you'd find on the Ultra Lounge 'Christmas Cocktails' albums. Something with bit of a retro feel."

Despite his theatre background, Lorenson is often called a crooner, a term sometimes used dismissively for performers of a certain style. He's comfortable with the appellation. "I embrace it. Crooning is a very specific way of singing and usually only applies to a male singer. The only female crooner I can think of is k.d. lang or maybe Rosemary Clooney. Otherwise they're really more torch singers like Julie London. Bing Crosby started the style because instead of belting out tunes, he learned how to work the microphone and sing softly to achieve a different effect."

"Loose" and "unstructured" are the adjectives Lorenson uses to describe the show that is also a reunion with his original recording musicians Kelly Park and Tony Malfatti. "It's kind of like a Rat Pack show where we all do our thing and there's not tightly scripted patter. How we get from one singer to another is pretty fluid and done is sort of a 'see how it goes' style. People tell me after the show that it's like they went to a party at someone's house and folks just gathered around the piano in the living room to sing some songs."

**MORE INFORMATION...**

**WHO:** Russ Lorenson

**WHAT:** The Rrazz Room at Hotel Nikko

**WHEN:** December 23 at 7:00 p.m.

**WHERE:** 222 Mason Street, San Francisco

**TICKETS:** \$30 | Phone: 866.468.3399 | Online: Ticketweb