

Benedetto left his heart in San Francisco; Russ Lorensen sings The Song

May 28, 4:44 PM · Albert Goodwyn - SF Performing Arts Examiner

Announcing "the obligatory encore" at his show *Benedetto/Blessed*, now at The Eureka Theatre, Russ Lorensen says, "You didn't think I'd do a Tony Bennett show without that song, do you? If you don't know what song you should move." His cabaret show is a tribute to the life and works of Tony Bennett. From the more than 2,000 songs Bennett recorded so far in his career (He's still singing), Lorensen and his Music Director Kelly Park selected more than 20 for the show.

Lorensen does not try to imitate Bennett, but he has a smooth, well controlled tenor voice. He selected songs in styles ranging from jazz to pop. He easily moves from a fast swing song into a slow crooning of Cy Coleman's "It Amazes Me," recorded by Bennett in 1958. Lorensen sings "Danny Boy," dedicated to Bennett's son, with languorous yearning.

His between-song patter describes Bennett's life and career, drawing largely from the autobiography. He tells of Bennett's birth name, his first stage name and of how he was discovered by Bob Hope. After describing Bennett's war experiences and how he kicked his cocaine habit in the early '70s, Lorensen points out that Bennett had a number-one hit album when he was 80 years old. He's 84 now. Lorensen sets each song in context with insights to Bennett's life.

"This show is about the music," he says. His backup quartet is adept in all the different song styles. The music and Lorensen project well in the large space of the Eureka Theatre., especially when he does that traditional off-mike song that Bennett works into every show. His voice has a slight nasality and he uses broad, open tones. On the high passages he maintains pure tones with flawless pitch, although sometimes he does not reach for those highs with confidence. He makes good use of syncopation and has an even sustain.

When he gets to "The Song," he gives it a native fervor. The arrangement is instantly recognizable and he sings it in his own voice, but the interpretation gives the lyrics a more urgent feel than Bennett's sound. He also invited the audience to sing along, if they knew the words.

Benedetto/Blessed: Celebrating the Life and Music of Tony Brnnett plays through June 27 at The Eureka Theatre, 215 Jackson Street, San Francisco. Tickets (\$25 in advance; \$30 at the door) are available online at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/103496> or by calling 415.674.3863

Copyright 2010 Examiner.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.



Russ Lorensen sings Tony Bennett
Photo courtesy of Russ Lorensen.com