

SAN FRANCISCO

by Richard Connema

Russ Lorenson at the Empire Plush Room

Russ Lorenson is a rising young singer who recently played the Empire Plush Room prior to heading east to debut at Helen's Hideaway Room in Manhattan April 15-16. He will embark on a 15-city tour through the United States and the United Kingdom following that date promoting his CD called *A Little Travelin' Music*.

Russ is an elegant performer who has faultless musical taste and vocal phrasing. He has a voice that is reminiscent of some of the great singers like Tony Bennett, Chet Baker and a little of Mel Tormé. Russ's voice is flexible when he sings both swinging and romantic songs. The San Diego Union-Tribune said that his act is "relaxed, [with] easy deliveries ... that seem natural and heartfelt." I am inclined to agree with that statement. Russ is also a delightful raconteur as he talks about his travels when he was setting up computer programs for companies in Europe and Asia.

Since his breakout club debut last year, Russ has established a reputation as one of the Bay Area's leading interpreters of jazz standards. He is backed by a terrific jazz quartet with Kelly Park (the musical director and pianist), Adam Goodhue on drums, Tony Malfatti on sax, clarinet and flute, and Reid Whatley on bass - they captivate the audience with their cool arrangements.

Russ Lorenson centers his 90-minute act on his traveling over one million air miles to various countries around the world. Along the way the audience hears songs by Cole Porter, the Gershwins, Johnny Mercer and Cy Coleman. Between the songs he tells wonderful stories about foreign foods from these lands and the wonderful adventures he had traveling. The act is cleverly conceived and a beautifully balanced program of jazz standards and a few obscure Broadway gems.

Lorenson enters the small stage carrying a suitcase with various logos on the front and back, singing Jimmy Van Heusen and Sammy Cahn's "Come Fly with Me" in a swinging up beat arrangement that gets the show off to a good start. The singer changes to a salsa beat with Antonio Carlos Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes's "The Girl from

Ipanema." His pleasurable voice is cool when he sings a medley of George Gershwin's "A Foggy Day In London Town" and Manning Sherwin and Eric Maschwitz's "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square," done a capella. He does a wonderful New York medley that concludes with "New York, New York." There is a rarely heard Bernie Hanighen and Johnny Mercer song, "The Air Minded Executive," sung with an agile voice. The cabaret artist is droll when he sings Noel Coward's "Why Do the Wrong People Travel?" His voice has thematic resonance when singing John Blackburn and Karl Suessdorf's "Moonlight in Vermont" and Amy Foster-Skylark and Jeremy Lubbock's "Home to Stay."

Sax player Tony Malfatti does a vibrant jazz solo when Russ sings Cole Porter's "I Love Paris" and then the singer does a great camp rendition of Henry Mancini and Leslie Bricusse's "Gay Paree" from *Victor, Victoria*. Russ ends the segment with, what else, Bronislau Kaper and Walter Jurmann 1936 song "San Francisco".

Russ Lorenson played the Empire Plush Room on March 14, 2006. The room is located in the historic York Hotel, 940 Sutter Street, San Francisco. Russ's CD, *A Little Travelin' Music*, will be coming out in May of this year on the LML Music label.

- [Richard Connema](#)