



Siora takes audience on a magic-carpet ride

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The Philadelphia-based band leads the city Bandshell audience on a worldwide tour of music.

By Susan L. Peña

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The sounds of the world washed over City Park Friday night under a moonlit sky, as Siora took the stage as part of the Chevrolet Bandshell Concert Series, presented by Berks Art Council.

While the crowd basked in the cooler weather, the Philadelphia-based band took it on a magic carpet ride to Brazil, France, Italy, Portugal, the Middle East and beyond.

Vocalist Phyllis Chapell, who sings in 11 languages, has a voice to die for. If cappuccino had a voice, it would be hers--sultry, luxurious, smooth and creamy. She has a wonderful feel for Brazilian music and can dance the samba with the right moves.

But she can easily slip into all kinds of other music, giving it a vocal treatment that respects the tradition and even elevates it to fine art, and using her terrific ear for languages to achieve perfect diction.

It would be tempting to say she stole the show, but that's not the case. The band made up of pianist/composer/arranger Dan Kleiman, bassist Rob Swanson, drummer Jimmy Coleman, percussionist Larry Marshall (a Reading native), and saxophonist/flutist Greg Riley was perfectly capable of stealing it right back, and often did, with well-crafted arrangements and intriguing solos.

Their fascination with world music has given them interesting raw material for treatments that are grounded in jazz. In fact, Siora would be an excellent addition to Berks Jazz Fest. Kleiman, a formidable pianist, has blended Latin, Middle Eastern and other rhythms and music into songs that are still, in the end, jazz.

They performed several Brazilian numbers Chapell's specialty including an Afro-Brazilian tune and a medley which incorporated Portuguese fado and a jazz standard.

They also performed several original songs in English; the French Edith Piaf song "Under Paris Skies"; the Italian "Estate"; the old American "Shenandoah" in a sweet, soulful arrangement with a fine bass solo; and a Yemeni prayer for peace.

Chapell also included a song whose text was the word "mother" in 11 languages, in honor of her own mother, who was present at the concert.

In every case, she and the band gave balanced, vibrant, colorful performances.

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