



Cabaret Review: 'When Everything Was Possible: A Concert (with comments)

at New York City Center

Reviewed by Erik Haagensen
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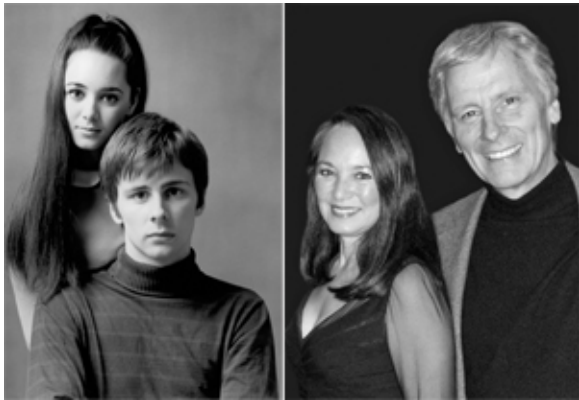


Photo by Kenn Duncan

Kurt Peterson and Victoria Mallory came to New York in the mid-1960s—he from the Midwest, she from the South—to pursue their dream of singing on Broadway. Both found success, creating roles in musicals such as "Follies," "Dear World," and "A Little Night Music" and playing Tony and Maria opposite each other in "West Side Story" at Lincoln Center. For most of the time they were doing that they were also a couple. Ultimately, they split up, married other people, and their lives took them away from performing on Broadway. After 30 years of nary a phone call

they reconnected, and tonight they told us all about it onstage at New York City Center in "When Everything Was Possible," a unique and pretty wonderful "concert with comments."

Backed by a 13-piece orchestra conducted by one of Broadway's best musical directors, Michael Rafter, and armed with new orchestrations by the great Jonathan Tunick, Peterson and Mallory proved that they still have what it takes. The evening began with a smart piece of special material, "There" (music by Jesse Wiener; lyric by Peterson and Wiener), that told us all about the young Kurt and Vicky and how they got to Manhattan. They met as students at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy and while studying found employment in children's theater, which supplied a charming coupling of two songs they introduced in separate gigs, Peterson as a prince-turned-frog and Mallory as, you guessed it, a princess. Before you know it, they are being cast in "West Side Story" by composer Leonard Bernstein and producer Richard Rodgers, and their careers and romance are off and running. Judging from their rendition of "Tonight" tonight, they must have been quite something.

The concert continued in chronological fashion through material from Jerry Herman's "Dear World," Bob Merrill's "Carnival" (Mallory played Lili at City Center), and Stephen Sondheim's "Follies," "A Little Night Music," and "Company" (Peterson was Bobby in the show's Canadian premiere). Augmented by a variety of terrific period photographs by Broadway show photogs Kenn Duncan and Van Williams that capture them in the glow of youth, the festivities soon took on a heart-tugging "Follies"-like air.

Though the two did re-create songs that they had once performed, they also made the fortuitous choice of singing material they didn't introduce from shows they were in,

which provided more than a few of the evening's highlights. These would include a touching pairing of Mallory on "And I Was Beautiful" and Peterson doing "Kiss Her Now," both from "Dear World," and a wry "The Little Things You Do Together," from "Company" (their long-ago love affair added more than a frisson of emotion to these). Mallory also scored with a simple and direct "Send in the Clowns," and the "Follies" duet "Too Many Mornings" was beautifully sung and full of feeling. Indeed, you could sense how these performances were being informed by repeated close-up viewing of the originals. Far from copies, they had a fascinating integrity.

Other standouts included Mallory's thoughtfully acted "I Remember" (Stephen Sondheim, from the TV musical "Evening Primrose"), which she did in the 1974 Peterson-produced Broadway tribute to the composer-lyricist, and Peterson's robust and just as intelligently acted "Being Alive." But the best of all was getting a chance to hear two songs they introduced in "Follies": Mallory's aching "One More Kiss" and Peterson's "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow," a high-spirited duet in which Mallory joined him as they reproduced Michael Bennett's magical choreography, complete with her leap into his arms punctuated with a high kick. Take that, time!

The celebrity-dotted audience included "Dear World" star Angela Lansbury, "Follies" star John McMartin, "Night Music" star Patricia Elliott, and legendary producer-director Harold Prince. Indeed, the small and tight-knit Broadway community was out in force to welcome the prodigals home. But though this was just a one-night affair, a benefit for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, "When Everything Was Possible" has legs. I wouldn't be surprised to see it return elsewhere for a longer engagement, and if it does no young performer starting out in musical theater should miss it. Not only will you learn a lot; it'll give you hope.

Presented by James William Productions and Stephenie Skyllas as a benefit for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS at New York City Center, 131 W. 55th St., NYC. Sun., April 29, 7:30 p.m.

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