



No Need to Leave the Lobby for a Seat at These Shows

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JANIRA grabs the skirt of her silky dress and begins to move her hips as the saxophonist plays the intro to her song “This Too Shall Pass.” Her dancing holds the audience even before she begins to sing, in a strong, soulful, voice.

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If she were standing on a stage, she would command it. But tonight there isn't one.

Artists who perform in the “Live in the Lobby” series at the Patchogue Theater for the Performing Arts are at eye level with their audience, in front of the doors leading into the main auditorium. Even without a stage, it is a felicitous space for music listening. The acoustics in the theater’s Art Deco lobby are impressive; professional stage lighting washes the performers in a pink-and-yellow glow. Fifty portable chairs are set up for the audience, and there is ample standing room, especially around the active bar.

The Patchogue Theater lobby is the setting for a concert each month featuring Long Island artists who perform original music. The series officially began in January 2006 to showcase up-and-coming talent and to give area residents another reason to frequent the theater, according to Christopher Capobianco, a board member who is also the theater’s director of communications.

“Word got out,” Mr. Capobianco said. Artists heard about it, and soon “I had them coming to me.”

“Live in the Lobby” has become so popular that theater volunteers are now raising money to improve the equipment used for the series. They have organized a July 5 concert of mainly acoustic music by more than 15 artists who either have performed in the series in



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the past or have wanted to do so, Mr. Capobianco said. Proceeds will be used toward purchasing better seating and a sound system. Currently the artists have to bring their own sound equipment.

The concert series welcomes performers in all genres, as long as their repertoires include more original songs than cover tunes. Tickets are usually sold at the box office and at the door for \$5 to \$10.

On June 7, Janira, a vocalist from Long Beach who sings what she describes as contemporary adult music, performed with her six-piece band. Then she turned over the stage to Giovanni Von Essen and her band, EssenTial, for a set influenced by R&B, jazz, soul and pop.

Throughout the two-and-a-half-hour concert, the doors to the theater remained ajar, allowing a mild evening breeze to drift into the lobby and the honeyed songs to float onto the sidewalk in front. The music lured John Creutzberger of Blue Point, who had just finished dinner at a restaurant a few doors away on Main Street, he said.

“I like the informal atmosphere,” he said. “It was easy to get into. I didn’t have to wait on any lines.”

The atmosphere that night was a cross between a nightclub and a theater. People were free to chat over drinks toward the front of the lobby — which serves as the rear of the concert space — while those who came specifically for the music could take a seat in front of the performers and enjoy it without interruption.

Janira Campos, who uses only her first name on stage, said the setup is a dream for an original music artist. “It’s an environment where people are actually there to hear you,” she said.

She added that the concert series is unusual in that it welcomes artists who are still building their fan base.

Supporting such artists is the foundation of the series, Mr. Capobianco said.

“We fantasize that when they make it big, they’ll remember us,” he said.

A concert with more than 15 performers, benefiting the “Live in the Lobby” series, will be held on July 5 at 7 p.m. at the Patchogue Theater for the Performing Arts, 71 East Main Street. Information: www.patchogetheatre.com or (631) 207-1313.

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