

“Back to Bacharach” Scores a Triple Play for 3Girls3

We should be reasonable in our demands of cabaret. Let's limit ourselves to three main expectations: 1.) A show should have excellent musicality, 2.) A show should be fun, and, 3.) A show should have heart. “Back to Bacharach,” presented at Davenport's Cabaret and Piano Bar (1383 North Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago; Phone 773)278-1830) by 3Girls3 satisfies these expectations in a powerhouse triple play.

3Girls3 consists of vocalists Gail Becker, Heather Moran, and Mary Monica Thomas. When harmonizing, they sound as one. However, their quite different stage personalities make the trio intriguing and fun. Becker comes across as intellectual, Moran as innocent, and Thomas as glamorous. (Thomas' curly locks are gorgeous but the hair tossings sometimes distract.)

The Girls praise the prolific Bacharach's work yet take us to truthful places by discussing the composer's challenges, too. Their anecdotes reveal how certain Bacharach hits flopped in early release, “Ill Never Fall in Love” by Ella Fitzgerald and “Alfie” by Cher, are examples. These stories added fun, gossipy layers to Back to Bacharach. Their rendition of the corny theme song from the 1958 film, *The Blob*, (lyrics by Hal David) was not only a hoot; it showed Bacharach's versatility.

Heather Moran was the last vocalist to solo. The introduction lauded her patient wait for her chance to shine. In an hysterical turn, her cohorts are unable to respect her solo opportunity in “That's What Friends Are For” (lyrics by Carole Bayer Sager). Thomas, soon followed by Becker jumps in to upstage Moran's solo, contradicting the tune's charitable message. When the otherwise kind-natured Moran mutters “Bitches...” we are not only laughing our heads off; we nod heartily in agreement.

The Girls wisely recognize that even a lighthearted cabaret needs its serious moments. Gail Becker takes us deep inside “Alfie” (from the 1966 film, *Alfie* with lyrics by Hal David). Becker understands what its lyrics ask Alfie (and us) to consider: “And if only fools are kind, Alfie, then I guess it is wise to be cruel.” The sex versus love debate continues.

Steve Carson brought excellent accompaniment to the evening, responding well to the different singers and their particular interpretations.

Impressive arrangements enabled the three vocalists to really strut their stuff. Kudos to arranger John Steinhagen for arrangements that provided rich rhythmic and harmonic texture to Back to Bacharach.

A highlight of the show is the three-singer medley combining Moran, finding the desperation in “Anyone Who Had a Heart”, Becker, plumbing the caveat of a not so fluffy “Wives and Lovers”, and Thomas finding tender balance between sorrow and self-deception in “One Less Bell to Answer.” Each vocalist not only honors Hal David's lyrics, but lands in the musical sweet spot despite the variant tempi of the three tunes.

To paraphrase, Beckie Menzie, a cabaret artist whom I admire greatly, when a show is going just right, we find ourselves falling in love with the singer. I found myself wanting to hug all three Girls. I'll risk enough germs to catch pneumonia.