

Karrin Allyson Master Class at Union College

By Tom Pierce

No doubt, many of us have favorite activities that almost border on *fantasies*. For this passionate fan of Jazz vocals, who has a deep curiosity and fascination with listening to Jazz singers discussing their craft, high on the list is attending a Jazz vocal master class. Not being a singer myself, I've only had one previous opportunity (singer Carmen Bradford at the 2002 Syracuse Jazz festival) to attend one, which was very enjoyable.

But on Friday, November 7 at Union College, my eager anticipation was heightened, as this one was being given (through the auspices of A Place For Jazz President Tim Coakley, who I work closely with) by one of my favorite living vocalists, Karrin Allyson, prior to her concert at the Whisperdome, whom I had recommended to the APFJ Advisory Committee. As if this weren't enough, the attendees were four of my singer-friends in this: Jody Shayne, Perley Rousseau, Patti Melita and Nancy Donnelly, all of whom I enjoy being around for *any* occasion. I confess to feeling like the proverbial "kid locked overnight in the candy store."

The other attendees were jazz pianist Tim Olsen, Tim Coakley, Perley's husband and musical partner, pianist Sonny Daye, and Karrin's close friend Bill McGlaughlin, a classical conductor, composer, and nationally known radio host, as

well as co-producer of several of Karrin's CD's.

After very briefly outlining her musical background and vocal approach, which she described as *conversational*, Karrin asked each of the four vocalists (all of whom have years of professional experience, as well as their own recordings available on cdbaby.com) to do a song of their choosing, accompanied by Tim Olsen. Nancy Donnelly started things off with an energetic version of "Just Friends."

Jody Shayne followed with an interesting take on "A Slow Boat to China," including some of her own interesting lyrics that Karrin complimented. Patti Melita did a



Photo By Andrzej Pilarczyk

fluid "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart". And after a bit of coaxing, Perley did an engaging duet with Karrin of "Autumn Leaves," which featured both English and French lyrics.

After each of their initial renditions, Karrin, in addition to expressing her enjoyment in hearing each of their personal interpretations of these standards, offered very constructive ideas for their consideration. These included suggestions on consistency of tone, simplicity (but va-

riety) of hand and body movements, use of rhythmic motifs to grab the listener, opening up more on vowel sounds, focusing on melodic storytelling in a chorus, versus improvisational soloing choruses and possible variations in the tempo utilized. She also gave them an opportunity to re-do the song to apply (in their own unique way), some of these thoughts. This was followed by very enjoyable duets/scats by her and a number of them.

She also provided additional information and insight to the group as a whole in responding to specific questions, especially those from Perley, who came with a very relevant list. These included queries on vocal warm-up techniques, rest, determining song set lists and the possible value of learning the piano, among others.

Karrin's singing together and trading choruses with them was one of several ways she showed her obviously genuine support of them and understanding of the difficult world of Jazz singing.

I personally found her warm physical affection (hugging each of them both before and after each performance) very moving, as it showed her empathy for them as fellow members in this extremely demanding profession; as well as her enjoyment and appreciation, as a fan of the music, for the chance to hear their approach.