

Brian Mitchell, Nancy Atlas Take Bay Street Theatre to New Orleans

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Nancy Atlas has made a few promises about her weekly Fireside Sessions at Bay Street Theatre in Sag Harbor: She's said that she's going to "bring it on" that the audience will "never know what they are going to get" and that the entire series will "make the winter just a little bit warmer." So far the Friday night concerts featuring a special guest backed by Atlas' band and occasionally other popular local artists have met all of these promises and possibly surpassed even Atlas' expectations.

As the house filled once again for this past Friday's Valentine's Day concert it was clear there was plenty of love in the air and on stage where a massive bouquet of red roses glowed in the projected firelight. A trip down to New Orleans courtesy of Atlas' special guest Brian Mitchell was about to begin.

Mitchell is probably best known as having worked with Levon Helm as a member of The Midnight Ramble in Woodstock joined Atlas on stage along with trumpeter Kenny Rampton and regular Atlas band members Johnny Blood on guitar, Richard Rosch on drums and Brett King on bass. Jumping into the first tune, "Such a Night," the band quickly proved one of Atlas' promises—you'll never know what you're going to get at the Fireside Sessions. Like the perfect box of Valentine candies each number was a sweet piece, different from all the rest but all drenched in some very tasty and often soulful dark chocolate.

A highlight for this Atlas fan came early on with Atlas doing her own interpretation of "Crazy", the Willie Nelson composition made famous by Patsy Cline. As it does with Cline, the song showcased the pure tones, deep emotion and varied textures Atlas is able to achieve vocally. The same can be said for the Atlas version of "Wild Horses." Always a favorite at her "regular" summer shows Nancy has managed to make this Stones classic her own in a very deep way and it remains the only cover she has ever recorded. For a show that highlighted the music and performing of the guest artist heavily over its host "Crazy" and "Wild Horses" stood out to remind us all that despite the "special guest star" emphasis Atlas puts out there every week these really are her shows in the best possible way.

There were duets to "Darling, Darling, Darling" and the weekly Beatles nod "I've Got a Feeling" as well as Mamalee joining Nancy on stage for a bluesy version of "Stand By Me." Mitchell's original tunes "First We Tango" and "I Only Smoke When I'm with You" had the crowd whistling their approval.

While the audience seemed to completely enjoy the Mitchell/Atlas duet on "I Ain't Easy to Love" they clearly disagreed with Atlas' claim that she could identify with the song as the weekly shout outs of "We love you Nancy" continued to pop up throughout the night.

An evening with such heavy Zydeco leanings and Atlas could not be complete without a performance of her New Orleans inspired original tune “Uncle Suzie.” With Mitchell switching to accordion and Rampton adding a delightful layer with his trumpet back up and solos this was certainly a highlight of the evening. By the time the band got to the Little Feat tune “Dixie Chicken” many in the crowd were on the dance floor basking in that warmth that flows from the Nancy Atlas Fireside Sessions when Atlas and her friends bring it on.