

Jonny Rosch, Nancy Atlas Heat Up Bay Street Theatre at Fireside Session

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There are a few things regulars at the Nancy Atlas Fireside Sessions can always depend on: 1) the show starts a little bit late, maybe 10 minutes. This week the short delay was because Nancy ran back to Montauk after a sound check to see her 7-year-old son in a school talent contest for his first public performance as a drummer. It appeared the nearly sold-out crowd of over 280 forgave her (the show started at 8:18) and probably loved her even more for it; the atmosphere at these shows is delightfully relaxed. 2) Nancy and guest will come out in Bay Street Theatre costumes, generally pretty funny stuff. 3) Nancy will wear her rakish hat with feather, which made its first appearance at the Chad Smith show, through the entire performance. 4) The guest will be a top rung, fantastically talented musician who in some outstanding way will complement Nancy and her band members perfectly. Finally, the ultimate thing the audience can expect 5) The unexpected!

Like a tightrope walker who's already crossed the raging Mississippi, Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon, Nancy Atlas must be thinking at the end of the show each week, "How do I top this?" If she's not, I promise you most of the audience is. Yet, each week Atlas and friends do not disappoint. While it's impossible to say one show has been "better" than another, it's very clear that every week has showcased varied musical talents many in the audience were not familiar with and also highlighted an aspect of Atlas' own impressive arsenal of talent.

This week, due to some technical/equipment difficulties that plagued special guest amazing bluesman Jonny Rosch, Atlas got to show off her improvisational, go with the flow, pull it out of the air entertainer skills. Her years as the leader of the "house band" for the Stephen Talkhouse have made Atlas bullet proof. Fending off the over enthusiastic, beer bottle waving crowds at her "home base" is probably what has made Atlas a performer who can transition through just about anything while carrying the audience lovingly in the palm of her hand. Friday night she pulled out stories of meeting a French speaking yeti in her backyard and an impromptu performance of one of her older original tunes "Love is Suicide" as she steered the audience through screeching amplifier feedback, unexpected Star Wars sound effects and the presence of the soundman on stage in the midst of it all. There was never a moment when those in the audience seemed bothered, annoyed or even mildly concerned with the unplanned series of events taking place on stage. It was all part of a fantastic show that close to 300 people—on the last day of January in a summer resort village that is typically almost shuttered down this time of year—were enjoying immensely.

Rosch, also a real trooper at overcoming the minor technical issues, delighted the audience with his vocal prowess, keyboard style and warm personality. Known as "the Rock 'n' Roll doctor" during his time with the Blues Brothers (yes, the band formed by *SNL* stars Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi), Rosch is a much sought after vocalist and

keyboard player who has traveled the world performing with the likes of Phoebe Snow. Rosch, who just happens to also be the brother to Nancy Atlas Project drummer Richard Rosch, brought a decidedly bluesy and soulful influence to the evening.

Delighting the audience with his interpretations of the Stones' "Backstreet Girl," John Prine's "I Ain't Hurtin' Nobody" and knocking it out of the park with his own special version of Marc Cohn's "Walking in Memphis," Rosch also seemed to draw out a different sounding Atlas for their duet on "When Something Is Wrong with My Baby" as well as for John Prine's "In Spite of Ourselves." In this Rosch duet choice, Atlas somehow sounded sweeter and more innocently playful than her hard rockin' or even Southern rocker self. These vocal pairings with the gruff voiced Rosch often found Atlas leaving the gravely, vocal styling to her partner which left her sounding lovely in a whole other way.

Another member of the Rosch family, singer Annie Morgan Rosch (wife to drummer Rich) was called on stage to join her brother-in-law and Atlas in "The Weight." Belting out her verses with great tone and style, Mrs. Rosch reminded many in the audience that she's no stranger to this band leader/singer gig at all. The surprise "local" guests joining the band or popping up out of the crowd from week to week has been another true to form Atlas touch the audiences enjoy.

For anyone keeping track; Atlas opened the show with a tribute to Pete Seeger by performing a solo, acoustic version of "Turn! Turn! Turn!" She also dedicated what should become the anthem for this area, her original composition "East End Run," to her folks, who were both in the audience. Once again showing off her range as a composer and performer Atlas pulled off a respectable "impersonation" of Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash and Clint Eastwood (in rapid succession) for her humorous "Kiss My Ass," while switching to Spanish lyrics for her hard rockin' "Montanita." The Beatles homage for the week was a rousing duet for Atlas and Rosch of "Get Back." The audience was also treated to "In Spite of Ourselves," "Do Your Thing," "Don't Keep Me Wondering" and "Hold on I'm Coming" during over two hours of solid music.

There will be no Fireside Session next week on February 7 but Atlas and friends come back full force with very special guest Brian Mitchell for a Valentine's Day performance. Considering that Atlas and her band have stolen the hearts of half the East End throughout the month of January this show is headed for another sell out crowd so call Bay Street's box office and reserve your tickets now, 631-725-9500. The Nancy Atlas Fireside Sessions are a dozen long-stem, red roses and a box of Godiva chocolates all wrapped up in one, so treat that someone special in your life to an unforgettable night of music for Valentine's Day.