

Nancy Atlas Fireside Sessions Come to an End with Arno Hecht

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It never seems fair but all good things must come to an end. This time it is the end of the weekly Nancy Atlas Fireside Sessions at Bay Street Theatre. The final concert in the two-month long, eight-show series, featured the very talented saxophone player Arno Hecht as special guest and as we have come to expect the show blew the audience away.

Fireside Sessions star and creator Nancy Atlas was sounding in top form and put it all out there for the almost sold out theater full of music fans. Joining her band was guest guitarist Klyph Black (sitting in for Johnny Blood as well as providing some outstanding vocal assistance), the very talented keyboardist Dan Koontz (sitting in for Neil Surreal) and popular Hoo Doo Lounger Dave Giacone on percussion. Long-time Nancy Atlas Project band members bassist Brett King and drummer Richard Rosch were once again expertly holding the beat and keeping time for Atlas and guests.

It feels apropos as the series comes to an end to point out that what most assuredly became the highlight for live entertainment on the East End during the winter of 2014 was really the product of—pardon the expression—a perfect storm. This winter has been chock full of all sorts of storms; snow, hail, rain, nor'easters, rolling fog and happily for anyone making it to any of the shows there has also been the conglomeration of talent, vision and place that created the perfect storm for Fireside Sessions. Amazingly, most of these storms all seemed to happen on or about Friday nights and still the crowds packed Sag Harbor's Bay Street Theatre.

First and foremost must be a nod to the passion, talent and vision of Atlas, for clearly without her none of this would have happened. We should also probably offer some thanks to her 6-month old daughter who made traveling out of the country for January and February out of the question— otherwise the eight weeks of joyous live music might have been something more like two.

So it was that Sag Harbor became the fortunate center of this perfect storm when Atlas sought out Bay Street Theatre managing director Gary Hygom with an idea. Her vision was to put on a weekly series of live music with special guests, maybe Thursdays in January and February, keep the ticket price low and the bar open. After hearing who some of the guests might be and having a vision of his own, Hygom suggested moving the series to Friday. He then designed a simple but perfect stage setting, there by literally and figuratively lighting the way for the next eight weeks of record breaking live musical shows. How fortunate for us that these two came together under the roof of Bay Street Theatre.

Having unabashedly enjoyed each and every one of these concerts it is with a hint of post-Fireside Session depression that I offer some highlights from this very last one. Thankfully, with the tasteful sax stylings of Hecht, there was no room for depressing thoughts during Friday night's concert.

The opening notes of Henry Mancini's "Pink Panther" theme set the tone for a very diverse and enjoyable evening of music. The epitome of cool, with credits that include playing with the Rolling Stones, Hecht's performance on every thing from "Night Train" and "Bring It on Home" to "Feelin' Alright" and "Hold on I'm Coming" lifted the band to another level. Add into this the talented Black, offering not only tasty guitar licks but also his own hard rocking vocals, especially on his performance of "One Way Out," popularized by the The Allman Brothers, and it is safe to say Atlas and her friends had the room on fire.

The weekly nod to the Beatles was a smokin', off the charts, simply wonderful interpretation of *A Little Help From My Friends*. A more fitting nod to what this entire series has seemed to stand for does not exist. A rockin' interpretation of the Stones Brown Sugar had everyone back up on the dance floor celebrating a joyously eclectic evening of live music which also included covers of "Peter Gunn," "Pink Cadillac" and "Young Americans."

As has often happened in this guest star driven weekly series the song writing talents of Atlas took a back seat, although fans were front and center on the dance floor for her original tunes "Large Marge," "Galaxy Eyes" and the encore finale "Talkhouse Song." For an artist who has perhaps at times been presented as a very talented songwriter who can also sing, Atlas has shown throughout this series that her pipes and her range are right up there with the best of them. Going out on a show which truly covered a wide variety of musical genres seemed to highlight what this series has revealed; that we should never be complacent about what to expect from Nancy Atlas.

The hints that this series will return next winter with Atlas once again at the helm were thrown out during and after the show on Friday night. It was clear Hygom was very positive about the theater wanting to do the series again. When asked specifically if she would be back next winter Atlas would not promise a commitment but offered this thought: "If this never happens again the point is it happened and that is amazing, and special and truly gratifying." However, the post-show entry on her Facebook page seemed a bit more promising: "The fireside sessions shall burn again when the days grow shorter and the lone buoy bell rings in the cold winter harbor. Till next year! Peace. Out."