

## Lady Sings The Blues Vol 2

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Already a seasoned performer when she attracted attention during the first season of the television talent show *The Voice*, battling her friend Mahalia Barnes, Prinnie Stevens has gone on to establish herself as one of the country's most accomplished performers.

The veteran of musicals *The Bodyguard*, *RENT*, *HAIR* and *Thriller LIVE*, Stevens has appeared on the West End and in New York alongside the likes of Patti La Belle, Chaka Khan, Mary J Blige and John Legend. Remarkably however, given that she grew up in Canberra and still has relatives here, *Lady Sings The Blues Volume 2* is the first time she has appeared in Canberra in her own show.

It's been worth the wait because judging by the capacity audience's response to this performance it won't be the last. With her accompanist, Dave McEvoy, seated at a shiny grand piano on a beautifully lit stage, Prinnie Stevens made a glamorous entrance, resplendent in an elegant ruby red sequined dress, long white gloves, sky high heels and her hair decorated with white gardenias.

After commencing her program with a sultry rendition of *It's a Man's, Man's, Man's World* (James Brown/ Betty Jean Newsome) she set the tone for the evening by adding *But it's a woman's world tonight*.

With *Lady Sings the Blues Volume 2* Stevens continues her celebration of female singers, mainly persons of colour in recognition of her own Tongan heritage, who overcame hardship and discrimination to pursue their careers, as did she and her mother.

Acknowledging that Canberra had not yet seen her award winning *Lady Sings The Blues Volume 1*, she commenced this performance by reprising singers featured in that show, in particular Billie Holiday with *Summertime* (George Gershwin) and Mahalia Jackson with *Amazing Grace* (John Newton).

Then followed a succession of songs, each introduced with an anecdote and represented by a song with which they are associated. Aretha Franklin with *I Never Loved a Man The Way I Love You* (Ronnie Shannon), Nina Simone with *Feelin' Good* (Anthony Newley/Leslie Bricusse), Tina Turner with *I Can't Stand The Rain Against My Window* (Ann Peebles) and Amy Winehouse with *I'm No Good* (Amy Winehouse).

For each song Stevens adopted vocal and physical mannerism associated with each of the singers, not imitating but rather inhabiting their style. Each was enhanced by superb accompaniments by Dave McEvoy who seemed to breathe with Stevens to accommodate her stylish embellishments.

Towards the end of the program, Stevens quietly discarded her high heels to perform Nala's song, *Shadowland* (Elton John/Tim Rice), from the musical *The Lion King*. Then, removing her headdress to let her long hair flow freely, she offered a heartfelt acknowledgement of country, and interpolated gentle traditional dance movements into a captivating rendition of *My Island Home*.

Her final dedication was to songstress Whitney Houston with *This Song is For You* (Claude Kelly/ Nathaniel Hills/ Marcella Araica), which she directed to her audience, and which McEvoy embellished with intricate rippling accompaniment.

This was cabaret at its finest with tasteful lighting and excellent sound enhancing an intelligently written and superbly performed program which left its audience informed about the artists being celebrated as well as the artists celebrating them.

The audience certainly recognised this and was reluctant to let the two artists leave the stage. Their enthusiasm was rewarded with a series of stunning encore dedications to Etta James, *At Last* (Etta James), Tina Turner, *Simply the Best* (Holly Knight/Mike Chapman), Carol King, *Natural Woman* (Carol King/Gerry Goffin) and finally to Beyoncé and Diana Ross with a thrilling performance of *Listen* (Beyoncé Knowles/Henry Krieger/Scott Cutler/Anne Previn).