

MUSICAL REVUE REVIEW

Marvellous moments

Four decades of 'girl music'

MOMENTS TO REMEMBER

★★★★/★★★★

WHO: The Mantini Sisters at Theatre Aquarius

WHERE: Irving Zucker Theatre of the du Maurier Centre, 190 King William Street, Hamilton

WHEN: Tonight through Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 2 and 8 p.m.

TICKETS: \$21 to \$44 at 522-7529 or 1-800-465-7529

By STEWART BROWN
The Spectator

As a few front-row Charlies will discover this week, there are far worse things in life than to have close personal attention paid you by the dishy Mantini Sisters.

But even beyond the flirting between stage and front row, there is widespread jubilation over the musical revue the Mantinis have brought to Hamilton until Saturday.

On the weekend, in fact, there were cheers at intermission and a standing ovation at the close as the Mantinis — Sandra, Barbara and Ann — kicked off 10 performances of Moments To Remember at the du Maurier Centre.

This is the Mantinis' pop-music tribute to girl singers — alone and in groups — from the 1940s to the 1970s.

This special presentation by Theatre Aquarius is attractive to look at, terrific in song and accompaniment, tastefully presented, consistently entertaining and professional to the core.

Moments To Remember features the Mantinis in melodic meandering through popular music over four decades. It begins with big-band canaries such as Helen Forrest and Doris Day, continues through novelty hits such as Shoo Fly Pie and This Ole House, reprises the girl groups from the Andrews and McGuire sisters to



The Mantini Sisters — from left, Ann, Sandra and Barbara — in Moments To Remember at Theatre Aquarius.

Ron Pozzer, The Spectator

the Chordettes and Dixie Cups, stops for 1950s' pop-toppers, pauses for extended sets of Connie Francis and Patsy Cline, then reaches the more electrified '60s and '70s terrain of Leslie Gore, Petula Clark, Dionne Warwick and Olivia Newton-John.

High-spirited medley

En route, there's a high-spirited medley of international hits from Volare to La Cucaracha and a retrospective of television themes and commercials (anybody remember Dippity-Do?)

The sisters share the spotlight with a generous sampling of solos in each set, usually rounded off with all three in tight harmony.

Sandra comes closest in style to singers such as Connie Francis, Doris Day, Patsy Cline and Karen Carpenter, while Barbara has Brenda Lee's vocal palpitations down pat.

But the flattery extends beyond imi-

tation and the Mantinis aren't afraid to put their own stamp on tunes, such as Ann's soulful, blues-tinged Tennessee Waltz.

As well, there's plenty of perky, sisterly humour, with the impish Ann logging mileage as the youngest ("by a lot!") of the three.

The show, neatly staged by Caroline Smith with musical arrangements by Howard Cable, is reminiscent of a confident supper-club revue.

Good taste abounds, from the sedate decor of sheer draperies and complementary lighting to the black and wine gowns and cocktail dresses and the music of pianist Mark Camilleri, bassist Ross MacIntyre and drummer Ernie Porthouse, who together show what the word "accompaniment" is all about.

Moments To Remember is a classy bonanza in nostalgia that deserves to do sellout business for the rest of the week.

'Broadway Babes' raise the roof with spirited performance

By JOANNA MANNING

FOR THE TRIBUNE
WELLAND

REVIEW

In a concert intended to raise money for the upgrading of stage lighting, the Mantini Sisters raised the roof and made certain some Broadway songs will never be heard in quite the same way again.

Saturday evening Sandra, Barbara and Ann paid tribute to some of the great ladies of Broadway and dedicated their performance to the brave land that has produced so many memorable musical theatre shows. 'Ladies of Broadway', the Mantini's newest show, takes audiences on a whirlwind tour of Broadway from the late 19th century through the days of Ethel Merman and Fanny Brice, the '40s and '50s when so many great musicals were created, to later performers such as Carol Channing, Mary Martin and Julie Andrews and recent hits such as 'Cats'.

Always great favourites when they perform in Welland, the Mantini Sisters have been singing and entertaining professionally for more than 15 years. This show, put on to raise funds for the lighting at the J.M. Ennis Auditorium at Centennial Secondary School, is one of the Sister's funniest and most stylish to date. Not only do these three talented siblings have lovely, quite different but lovely voices, they can act and come up with some neat footwork as well. They are totally uninhibited, able to turn cartwheels, wear funny costumes and ham it up, all while singing beautifully. All this means the audience has a wonderful time, hearing the melodies, timeless and ever meaningful, with fresh insights.

The 'Broadway Babes', to go by their first song, love to sing, solo and together. Sandra's smokey alto blending with Ann's lyrical soprano and Barbara's ability to scale to operatic levels. This was immediately evident in 'Poor Wandering One' from Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Pirates of Penzance' where Barbara's agile soprano floated with ease into the coloratura range. In three songs about women's relations with men,



Ann Mantini belts out a tune while sisters Sandra and Barbara look on during their Saturday night fundraising concert for the Dr. J. M. Ennis Auditorium improvements at Centennial Secondary School. TRIBUNE PHOTO KEVIN ARGUE

Barbara was amusingly caustic in 'I Hate Men', Ann endlessly funny, perfectly costumed, and right on, with her interpretation of 'I Can't Say No' from 'Oklahoma' while Sandra's sultry tones gave full meaning to 'Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend'.

An Ethel Merman tribute allowed the three to do full justice to "the better's" extrovert style while a few minutes later Sandra delighted with a joyfully tender version of 'I Could Have Danced All Night' from 'My Fair Lady'.

If fun is what you enjoy in musicals, the Mantini Sisters have that in aces, revealed in such sketches as 'The Audition' in which Ann plays an ingénue would-be performer whose enthusiastic puppy-dog manner causes the star, that's Barbara, to break an ankle which gives her the opportunity to appear on stage in 'If They Could See Me Now'.

Easily the most hilarious scene was the finale of the Gypsy Medley. In 'You Gotta Have A Gimmick' the girls took this song to new heights, at least I think that's the right word. With Ann's flashing heart costume and what Barbara got up to with her trumpet, well

few people will hear that song again without seeing those images.

In perfect contrast later, in Act Two, the three gave a poignant interpretation of the aching 'Memory' from 'Cats'.

A Rodgers and Hammerstein Tribute, with songs and solos from some of the best-known and best-loved musicals from many of our growing-up years proved that for the Mantini Sisters "There's No Business Like Show Business" but the audience would have kept them "singing all night" if they could have.

"The Ladies of Broadway was created for the Mantinis by Caroline Smith of the Stirling Festival Theatre where the show premiered.

During the evening the trio was ably assisted by the band; Mark Camilleri, music director, on piano, Tom Haslit on bass and Adam Warner on drums.

If you missed this great evening, remember the Mantini Sisters do have produced a CD 'Moments To Remember' from their first show though there's nothing like being at a live performance especially one as good as this was. The Sisters' website is www.mantinisisters.on.ca.

Music and comedy on stage

■ MANTINI SISTERS BRING THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS ALIVE

BY LYNN PEPPAS
TRIBUNE STAFF
WELLAND

Proving that good things do indeed come in threes, the Mantini Sisters brought the spirit of Christmas alive Saturday night with Home for the Holidays.

Performing at Welland Centennial Secondary School's J.M. Ennis Auditorium, the trio performed in lush three-part harmonies and solos.

The sisters, with a fabulous four-piece band, brought a variety of music to the stage that included some genuine comedy as well.

The Mantini Sisters – Ann, Sandra, and Barbara – put the 'family' component foremost into this show, opening with a delightful, familiar sounding comedic spat about which sister

looked the youngest. Truthfully, none of the sisters had anything to worry about; decadently dressed in seasonal, formal cocktail gowns, each had looks to match their beautiful voices, and each with their own charm and style.

The baby of the sister act, Ann was the 'cutiesy' one, and also the funniest of the trio.

Her solo of 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas' did show her more serious side, with her superb, lilting voice, but it was often the funnier bits where she really shone onstage. Her impish smile and flirtatious onstage manners brought a lot of charm to this production.

Her rap treatment of 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' was pure fun.

During the sisters' hillbilly rendition of Grandma's Killer Fruitcake, it was Ann who played up the comedic

sketch the most – her butt-scratch as she exited the stage left the audience smiling.

Sandra was the regal sister who sang the lower register for the three-part harmonies. In this concert she had ample opportunities to unleash her gutsy, powerhouse vocals. When she did her Broadway-diva act for 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas', the effect was stunning.

Welland's own singing Mantini sister, Barbara, had it all. She could let go and be as silly as Ann, or do an about-face and be the reigning diva of the stage.

This was so apparent in her Merry Christmas Darling and Santa Baby solos when she mesmerized listeners with the first song and tickled their funny bones with the second.

When these ladies came together to perform as a trio, it was perhaps the most fun set to awesome music. In the Twelve Days of Christmas, Ann tries to reign them in, but the sillier side of Ann has her performing her 'ballet' onstage.

Barbara definitely commanded this performance with her stellar "five golden rings." Reaching impossibly high notes with gorgeous clarity and control, she was the highlight of this piece. Even in the Chipmunk song, these ladies gave marvellous vocals with a side of comedy.



STAFF PHOTO/Lynn Peppas

From left: Ann, Sandra, and Barbara Mantini, put on the Home for the Holidays concert at Welland Centennial Secondary School's J.M. Ennis Auditorium. The trio performed in lush three-part harmonies and solos.

Their band was equally as awesome, with music director Mark Lalama on piano. Welland's own music celeb, the ladies performed an original song written by Lalama, Christmas Prayer, that was one of my favourite 'serious' pieces of this concert. Accompanied by renowned bass player George Koller, guitarist Steve

DeAngelis and drummer Mark Inneo, this quartet showed their chops performing that infectious Christmas jazz classic Linus and Lucy with great spirit and warmth.

The Mantini sisters performed a little bit of everything Christmas for this show, genuine comedy, combined with great music with unique treatments.

No matter what kind of a twist they put on their songs, it was always highly entertaining.

Mantini sisters as good as original female groups

By Stephen Pedersen
Arts Reporter

CONCERT REVIEW

It isn't difficult to discover why SNS Trad Pops conductor Howard Cable and the three singing Mantini Sisters sold out their pops concert last night at the Cohn — for the third time.

Everyone in the audience knew all the words to Roll Out The Barrel.

That sing-along staple of WWII and the euphoric post-war period, cunningly combined with The Beer Barrel Polka by the Andrews Sisters, was the final tune at the show, concluding a bouncy tribute to female singing groups from the 40s to the 70s.

The Andrews Sisters were represented by The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B, Don't Sit Under The Apple Tree, Bei Mir Bist Du Schon, and the polka ditty.

The Mantinis are not the Andrews Sisters, of course. But at the risk of offending a thousand people at Friday night's concert, they sing better than that excellent trio. Their sound is smoother and better blended, and their repertoire more versatile.

Last night we heard Sandra Mantini in Doris Day's Once I Had A Secret Heart giving a remarkable re-creation of Day's

cream-coloured voice, and later she turned it into a head-turning imitation of Connie Francis's singing Where The Boys Are.

Ann and Barbara Mantini also sang true to the style of those legendary pop singers of 40 years ago. The Mantinis' ability to sing both solo and in trio format stands at the peak of professionalism and polish.

The evening was dedicated by Cable to big band swing and female vocal groups. His arrangements of music originally played by the Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller, and Tommy Dorsey bands were given brilliant renditions by the musicians of Symphony Nova Scotia. They have learned how to swing and they are getting better at it every time out.

Cable, vigorous and virile at 80, is also a walking encyclopaedia of jazz history, an expert with a thousand details and anecdotes on the tip of his tongue on every pop era from Tin Pan Alley to the present.

He delivers these, as he does his symphonic arrangements, with professional polish, a light touch and a winning sense of humour.

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Thursday, December 9, 2004

A gift of music

■ A NEW CHRISTMAS CD FROM NIAGARA'S MANTINI SISTERS
FEATURES 15 SONGS WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF STYLES

BY GEORGE DUMA
Tribune Staff
WELLAND

It's a cold, snowy night outside, the fireplace is going, your favourite beverage is sitting by your side. It's the perfect atmosphere for the new Christmas CD from Niagara's Mantini Sisters.

The recently-released production features the sweet harmonies of Barbara, Sandra and Ann and is simply titled, *The Mantini Sisters Christmas*.

It's produced by Welland's Mark Lalama, who himself is a local legend with a long and varied musical background. His performing credentials include accompanying George Fox, Bruce Cochran, Lorne's Daughter, Jesse Cook and Michael Burgess to name just a few.

The production features 15 songs with a wide variety of styles. It begins with *I've Got My Love To Keep Me Warm*, featuring Guido Basso on trumpet. Thanks to The Andrews Sisters performing a Christmas tune during the mid-1940s and you'll get the idea behind this song. A great start to a fine CD.

It's followed by *There's No Place Like Home for The Holidays*, the old standard by Terry Carmichael which was later covered by The Carpenters. With its peppy steel guitar and fiddle, The Mantinis have taken a country approach to the song - and it works.

More's On The Mind by The World is an intriguing combination of Harry Belafonte's waltz married to the Three Dog Night hit. The Mantinis treat the songs with a clever feel and add a local flavour to it by featuring members of the outstanding St. Catharines choir, Chorus Niagara.

Next is *Travis in The Moon of Winter* (The *Winter* lullaby) which, one of the CD's standouts. The song is considered the first Canadian carol and is one of our country's national treasures. The Mantinis' rendition gives it the affirmation it deserves.

Then come the Christmas favourites, *Let It Snow*, *Let It Snow, Let It Snow*, *White Christmas*, *The Christmas Song*, *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*, and *The Little Drummer Boy*. The sisters take turns singing lead on these songs, but the other two are never very far away, weighing in for the kind of harmonies that happen after three individuals sing together for 20 years.

A Christmas Prayer was written by Mark

Lalama and his brother, Paul.

Here's how the sisters describe the song: "... This song crosses all religious lines. It is a prayer that every child should feel safe, loved and hopeful. It reminds us that little children have all the answers. As we get older, we complicate things. We need to keep the spirit of Christmas alive and look out for mankind. If you can reach out and help in any way big or small - everybody wins. It would be a perfect world." Amen.

The CD winds down with *It's The Most Wonderful Time of The Year*, *The Coventry Carol*, *What Child Is This*, *My Gift*, *Silent Night*, *Heavenly Face*, and *Born Again*.

My Gift is particularly touching. Years

after their dad died, Ann Mantini had a dream where her father came to her and sang her this lullaby. She says she never forgot it and decided to share this "gift of love" with listeners. We're the richer for it.

Born Again (*Quona Fortuna*) is a fitting end to the CD as the sisters wanted to do a small tribute to our Italian heritage. Italian music played a huge role in their childhoods and the CD would not be complete without such a tribute.

The Mantinis have long been Niagara's darlings and this Christmas CD is their gift to us. But don't wait to unwrap a copy on Christmas morning. This one should be listened to in the days leading up to

Christmas. Thanks, ladies, and Merry Christmas to you, too.

■ The Mantini Sisters Christmas CD has a MSRP of \$17.99 and is available at all major retail outlets. In addition, it's available through distribution by Indie Pool Canada and online at www.mantinisisters.com. Locally, it can also be purchased at Lewis & Kralj (DA Pharmacy on Thorold Road and St. Kevin's Parish on Niagara Street.

