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America Speaks Out – A Huge Success

by Howard Salus
Publisher

Big band leader, Sonny Mange, did a fantastic job packing the house at North Miami Beach Performing Arts Theater, Sunday afternoon, May 26th. The purpose of the function was to support the fire fighters of New York City, donating all monies to the Engine Co. 22 – Ladder Co. 13 family fund. Mange, who once played with the likes of Frank Sinatra, gets emotional when he talks about Sept. 11 and the firefighters lost at the World Trade Center. After seeing a report on CNN about Engine Company 22, Ladder Company 13, which lost 13 of its members, he vowed to stage a concert in their honor. What resulted was a marathon of music and entertainment that will be remembered for many years to come. Mange, along with vocalist wife Rachell Paston, organized an event that has few peers – over four hours of non-stop powerhouse music and song sprinkled with some outstanding comedy. Hats off to the two of you for bringing the community together in such a masterful way.

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From top to bottom, the production was compelling and engrossed everyone in the sold-out house. The overture, played by the full orchestra, was a tribute to America's armed forces and a salute to all firefighters and heroes of 9/11, ended with "Stars and Stripes" and Paston came out to sing "New York, New York" and "America." One of the many highlights of the marathon followed when North Miami Beach Mayor Jeffrey Mishcon (who actively assisted in putting the show together) came on stage and had a live telephone conversation with N.Y. firefighter Michael Heffernan, telling him how the city, and surrounding areas, are thinking of them and the lost heroes. It was very moving.

And then – Showtime with a long list of professional talents, including, in order of appearance, vocalist Lary Branchetti, the comedy of Bill Sims, the terrific renditions of vocalist Katie King, jokes by Dinny Dinnofor, vocalist Joe Politi, the hilarious and unique Francesca, the style of one of the original Platters, Duke Daniels, vocalist Lydia O'Connor, the talented Mark Friedman, who conducted the orchestra for a special arrangement he wrote and composed, dedicated to the lost firefighters, plus hitting the keys and singing another piece, the outrageous comedy of George Hopkins, the singing by Shirlee Baron, the strong voice of Renato Renzi, the high energy voice of Barbara Brighton, the comedic talents of Richard Terry, the singing of Errol Dante and finishing off with "I Believe" by Rachell Paston.