

AUGUSTANA Arts

Bryan Goldstein

Off Campus Show Reflection September 7th 2013

Neil Bridge 7+ with Karen Lee

The sun is setting, the Christmas lights are lit, and I am sitting in the beautiful courtyard of a church with a picnic dinner set, on a lovely Shabbos evening. I don't normally go to church on Saturday night, but this isn't just any evening gathering. This event marks the first performance of the Augustana Arts series and the excitement is felt in the air.

The group consists of the piano player and bandleader, Neil Bridge, on keys, his lovely wife Karen Lee of vocals and dance, PapiRay Pacheco and Paul Romaine on percussion, Chuck Schneider on sax, Derek Banach on trumpet, Tom Ball on bone, and my teacher, Mr. Ron Bland on bass.

This is a special show from the start because the Bridges have been mentors to me for a couple years and really guided me in the direction toward this music program. I enrolled and ended up studying with their bass player, whom they spoke highly of, so I am ready for a great set demonstrating solid musicianship. The show is now in the artists' hands to interpret the audience's expectations and take the whole group on a ride to remember.

They start with some solid standards, all arranged by Neil, which demonstrate the artistic prowess of the band. A few charts in, we hear Karen's dreamy voice from behind, and she walks straight down the center of the audience toward the stage singing strong and sparkling ecstatically in the bejeweled garb she is rocking. She finally gets to stage, but keeps the gaze of the audience entranced as she leaps for the horn section to Neil's side and back to the front of the stage throughout the next part of the set.

The group travels throughout musical genres with many different types of tunes. There are standards and originals with jazz, swing, Latin, and even funk feel happening. I found the son clave in both 2-3 and 3-2 in different pieces as well as many other Latin rhythms controlling the groove. Ron Bland did a great job jumping around these different styles with some bass tumbau, funkadelic slides, and the occasional swinging solo. Many of these bass interludes took a quick two or four bars filled with a rhythmic and melodic idea up high, while staying in form and popping out in time, still driving the song.

This was a special show for Neil and Karen because they were married at this church 21 years prior. The excitement for the music and love for each other was felt by the entire audience in a way that made us feel like we are a part of what is happening here and now. This aspect of connecting with the audience on a personal level is what creates a great show and in this case it felt good to me, so I'm sure it felt good to the crew too.