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Entertainment

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Much a deux about Mercer

By: Robert Sokol
Special to The Examiner
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SAN FRANCISCO – Linda Purl sings. That sentence is often followed by a question mark or an exclamation point. Despite an extensive stage and television career, fans of the elegantly beautiful star of “Happy Days” and “Matlock” are often surprised to discover that Purl’s as accomplished on a concert stage as she is on any other.

Lee Lessack also sings. That’s not a surprise. The boyishly handsome cabaret artist has been gathering fans since his debut recording in 1996. That self-produced CD also launched his bifurcated career as both performer and head of the independent label LML Music.

The pair team up at Razz Room this week in “Too Marvelous for Words” to celebrate the centennial of lyricist John Herndon “Johnny” Mercer. He’s the man behind more than 40 years of hits, including “Moon River” and “Blues in the Night.” The timing is near perfect.

“Johnny was born on Nov. 18, so we’re opening the same week, which is exciting,” Lessack says.

It’s a mutual admiration society for the two friends, who have worked together for several years.



Too marvelous: Actress Linda Purl and cabaret singer Lee Lessack perform tunes by master lyricist Johnny Mercer in “Too Marvelous for Words” at the Razz Room this week. (Courtesy Photo)

“She’s such a wonderful actress,” Lessack says of Purl, “and so accessible and down-to-earth on stage. Add in a divine voice, and it’s really quite a treat to work with her.”

Purl lobs back the compliments: “He’s tall, dark and handsome, and sings like a matinee idol. What’s not to love?”

With very active individual careers, the challenge is to mesh their schedules for rehearsal and performing time.

“Fortunately, we’re both pretty quick studies,” Purl says. “We usually do this show in a large concert hall, so there will be some work involved in scaling it to a smaller venue.”

Part of that challenge will be mitigated by having John Boswell, who did all the arrangements, as musical director and accompanist.

Both artists don’t seem content with just a performing career. In addition to his music label duties, Lessack has expanded into concert booking operations for himself and his roster of Broadway and recording artists.

“It only becomes a challenge when I’m on the road performing and feel like I should be back in the office booking acts and recordings,” he says, laughing.

Purl – who also plays the mother of Pam (Jenna Fischer) on NBC’s hit comedy “The Office” – has a penchant for mountain climbing and produces the annual California International Theatre Festival in Calabasas.

“It’s a ridiculous amount of work,” she says of the latter, “but always worth it!”

IF YOU GO

Linda Purl and Lee Lessack

Where: Rrazz Room, Hotel Nikko, 222 Mason St., San Francisco


When: 8 p.m. today-Wednesday

Tickets: \$35

Contact: (866) 468-3399, www.therrazzroom.com

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