
June 12, 2010

Max Weinberg's Big Band plays Red Bank

BY STAN GOLDSTEIN



A very enjoyable show how by the Max Weinberg Big Band at the Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank on Friday, June 11.

Max looked like he was having a lot of fun and was very proud to be fronting this 15-piece band.

To quickly answer the question most people have, no Bruce was not there, he did not play. Charlie Giordano did play on the final two songs.

Show began at 8:55 p.m. after a 45-minute set by a comedian named Vincent Brand who was pretty good. He said he was from Middletown, so I'm not sure if he's going to go out on the road with Max or this was just a one-night gig.

Curtain opened... Max is front-left, with a piano on the left of him (his right side) with a bass player in back. There's a 12-piece horn section, five saxophones up front, three trombones in a middle row and four trumpets in a back row.

I don't know the name of all the songs played but will give you the ones I did know. He did play about 18 songs, I only knew 13.

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1. This Could be the Start of Something Big.

There was a a big black and white backdrop of a city skyline. Nice lighting.
Max's drumhead read: "The Max Weinberg Big Band."

2. Come Fly with Me.

Nice to hear a Sinatra song.

After another song, Max came out and spoke. He has a goatee now and looked like a "1960s-style cool cat."

He told the crowd how delighted he was to be performing with the big band and his own family calls it "The Max Weinberg very expensive Big Band."

He said he liked a 1950s TV show called "The M Squad" a police drama on TV from 1957-60 and that the theme song was written by Count Basie who was mentioned quite a few times during the night being that the show was at his namesake theater.

3. The M Squad theme.

Very nicely done, perfect for a big band to play.

I didn't know the name of the next song....But it was again heavy on the horns.

Max talked to the crowd saying "This is the first time we played together. And I know you've never seem me come out from behind the drums." He said he was going to play a medley of Beatles songs that had been played by the Count Basie Orchestra.

Max talked about how Count Basie was a Red Bank legend and he had played in Asbury Park, Long Branch and Red Bank before relocating to Kansas City in 1929.

"John Hammond, who had a knack for finding talent in New Jersey, Freehold, New Jersey, heard the Count Basie orchestra in Chicago in 1936," Max said.

Max was so into talking about Count Basie that he said the next song was "Kid from Red Bank" but then said "No, we're not going to play that now. We're going to do the Beatles medley."

4. Beatles Medley: Help, Do You Want to Know a Secret and Kansas City.

Well played, I liked it.

5. Kid From Red Bank.

6. Can't Stop Loving You

The song that's been done by Ray Charles and Frank Sinatra

Max stood up to talk again, mention about all the cop shows on TV now and the CSI shows. One of his favorites was a show that lasted for a year and jokingly Max said: "I have some experience with shows that only last about a year."

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He said he enjoyed the theme from "Mr. Lucky" a TV show that was on only for one season from 1959-1960. Blake Edwards created the show and the theme was done by the great Henry Mancini.

7. Theme from Mr. Lucky

One of the highlights of the evening. Really nice. A few different solos from the horn section including a great trumpet solo.

8. Parthenia

"This is a song we had to play," Max said. "It was recorded by Buddy Rich, my all-time hero. One of the sweetest men I ever knew. Buddy Rich was the world's greatest drummer and he would tell you that. He was the Picasso, the Frank Sinatra of drums."

9. Only The Lonely

"A beautiful song by another Jersey Boy," Max said. He played the Frank Sinatra's 1959 version, not the Roy Orbison song.

10. Basically Blue

A Count Basie song.

11. Rat Race

By Quincy Jones for the Count Basie Orchestra

"You see there's a trend here tonight," Max said after playing "Rat Race."

At this point of the show, my friend said to me: "Max looks like he's having so much more fun out there than he usually does."

Yes he was.

The final song before the encores was "Bugle Call Rag". Max had a great-extended drum solo on it.

Max said this band is his focus now. The the tour will go West and come back this way.

He talked about the Joan Dancy & Pals Foundation (which the show was a benefit for) and talked about Joan and Terry Magovern and said we have a special song just for tonight.

An organ was brought out to the right side of the stage and Charles Giordano came out.

Encores;

12. Kitty's Back

Very cool big band version of the song. Kind of weird to see Charlie playing out in the front of the stage. A lot of fun.

A nice youtube clip of Kitty's Back from the show here

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Before the final song, Max said, "There's one song I've always wanted to play and never have, and I'm going to play it now."

13. I Want Candy

A 1965 song that's best known for the 1982 version by Bow Wow Wow.

This worked real well for a Big Band.

Two bass drums were placed up front and the piano player and the bass player played them. The four trumpet players in the back did vocals. (The only vocals of the night).

Then the horn players went into the crowd (like LaBamba and Mark Pender's horns have in the past). Two of the horns even went up in the balcony.

Great ending.

"Thanks you for making our debut night a memorable one," Max said as the entire band came out front to take a bow.

Show was over at 10:40 p.m. it lasted about 1:45.

Some notes: New Jersey Governor Chris Christie was sitting front-row center with his wife.

A friend texted me during the show and said Max now looks like hockey commentator Barry Melrose.

I thought the piano player looked like Ben Stiller and the bass player looked like actor Adam Goldberg.

There had been a lot of Bruce rumors but I'm not sure what he really could do with Max's band, play guitar on some songs, not sure even he could have sang on the version of Kitty's Back.

Max's mother was in the crowd and Jay Weinberg was hanging out in the lobby after the show.

If you enjoy Big Band music definitely go see the show, if you're looking for a Bruce fix, this isn't the show for it, but if you enjoy Max's drum playing, definitely go.

After slow ticket sales, they slashed most of the ticket prices in half last week, the theater looked to be close to full.