

Satin Doll Revue finds Detroit singers paying tribute to the leading ladies of jazz



Duante Beddingfield

Detroit Free Press

One of Detroit's most unique art happenings is an event that takes audiences back nearly a century, immersing music lovers in an environment that brings iconic female jazz singers of the 20th century back to life for one night.

The Satin Doll Revue is a transcendent experience that features a slate of Detroit's finest jazz singers who pay tribute to the legends who influenced them — and do an insanely good job of it. It happens a couple of times annually and returns Friday to Bert's Warehouse Theater in Detroit's Eastern Market.

The project is the brainchild of singer Sky Covington, who has performed a Billie Holiday tribute for more than two decades. She portrays Lady Day, alongside Kimmie Horne (as Sarah Vaughan), Thornetta Davis (as Bessie Smith), LadyLove (as Carmen McRae), Denise Edwards (as Lena Horne), Veronique Musique (as Nancy Wilson), Nina Simone Neal (as Dinah Washington), Tosha Owens (as Etta James) and the can't-believe-she's-real lightning bolt of Faye Bradford doing an absolutely uncanny performance as Nina Simone.

The ladies are accompanied by Gerard Gibbs on keys, Ibrahim Jones on upright bass and Terrance Neal on drums. Comedian Mike Bonner serves as emcee for the evening.

“The first revue was two years before COVID,” said Covington. “I had been doing a Billie Holiday tribute, but I wanted to share the stage. The idea of a group portraying all of these great women of jazz was a dream of mine. I reached out to Nina Simone Neal to play Dinah Washington, and that was how it got started. I had little ideas popping in my head about who else could come on board, and I started a vision board. We brought in Tosha Owens, and then Kimmie Horne called and said, ‘Sky, I want to be part of this.’”

“For these women, for people like Thornetta Davis, to be interested in anything I was doing was an honor. It just seemed like everyone was ready to take another step into

that world, and we wanted to do something that could actually take people back in time.”

A big crowd favorite at the revue is Veronique Musique, who portrays the great Nancy Wilson with stunning verve. Friday’s performance will be only her third with the revue.

Musique said Covington approached her at a Sunday night jam session at Detroit’s Woodbridge Pub and asked whether she’d consider playing and singing as “the Fancy Miss Nancy.”

“(Covington) said, ‘You just embody her to me,’” said Musique, “and I thought, ‘Wow, one of my favorite entertainers. And I told her there was no question — absolutely, I would be honored. And the irony is that I had seen the (Satin Doll Revue) a year before that, and I was with my boyfriend at that time, and I remember saying to him: ‘This is so amazing. I would love to be a part of this.’”

Musique, who began singing in early childhood, first heard Nancy Wilson sing on a 1989 episode of “The Cosby Show,” but it was another incident, some years later, that really delivered her to Musique as an influence.

“I was in my very early 20s, and I was a new mother,” she said. “I was also a PBS watcher, and I was flipping channels and I happened to come across her doing a concert — and the very first song that I heard her singing was ‘Guess Who I Saw Today?’ From that moment, I followed her, and I’ve just always adored her.

“Her artistry captured me, and, I daresay, really reignited my love for music.”

Musique said she believes the revue is a divine calling for Covington.

“I believe that God is using Sky in a way that I don’t think she was prepared for with her vision and her dream for this show. I often tell her this is just the beginning. When you sit and watch the ladies on that stage, you are transported back in time, and it’s amazing how they transform that gift.”

The Satin Doll Revue will be performed at 8 p.m. Friday at Bert’s Warehouse Theater in Detroit’s Eastern Market.. Doors open at 7 p.m. Tickets start at \$20 and are available at www.eventbrite.com.

Contact Free Press arts and culture reporter Duante Beddingfield at dbeddingfield@freepress.com.

