

'English ladies' win crowd

By James Windell
special writer

Cleo Laine was the featured attraction at Meadow Brook Music Festival on Saturday night, but it was an English program all the way through.

And it was ladies night — make that English ladies night. Because opening for the singer, who is known to some people as "the Voice," was pianist Marian McPartland, who herself has been called "the First Lady of Jazz."

You could also call this pianist "the Mistress of the Jazz Ballad." Although her musical style knows no bounds — she's been heard mixing John Coltrane's "Giant Steps" with a pop tune and an Ellington medley — she stuck to ballads Saturday night. And there weren't any complaints from the 6,000 people who filled Baldwin Pavilion and the Meadow Brook hill.

From the first of eight ballads ("My Secret Love") to the last (a lovingly treated "Close Your Eyes"), McPartland was the epitome of the polite and romantic jazz pianist. Her inventiveness with the tunes she selected for her 60-minute program allowed plenty of room for exploration of the themes and occasional solo work by her accompanists, Larry Grey on bass and Rusty Jones on drums.

HIGHLIGHT OF McPartland's set was her meanderings around Hoagy Carmichael's "Skylark." With the sun setting over the pavilion as she played this tune, and with irreverent sparrows chirping, she spun out a delicious bit of improvisation that bordered on the languid but proved you don't have to play lightning-fast run to swing.

Cleo Laine contributed her own ballads to this evening of English music. A versatile performer and consummate singer, Laine could sing lyrics from the phone book and make them sound interesting. What she did to Rodgers and Hart's "I Could Write a Book" was to reshape this old standard into a four-to-five union excursion with John Dankworth's alto saxophone.

Her ability to modulate and harmonize with her husband's alto is nothing short of amazing, and even though the alto sax has a wide range, Laine takes no back seat to that instrument.

Another ballad which hasn't been heard very often since the 1950s, but which she recorded 11 years ago in her "I Am a Song" album, is "Friendly Persuasion." Disarmingly, she takes it at a slow tempo, creating an elegant piece of music out of the pop tune.

But it wasn't all ballads for the mop-haired singer who believes in variety. She can scat a wordless solo, as she did to the crazy rhythms of "Crazy Rhythms," or turn Mozart's "Alla Turca" into a showcase for her marvelous, low-octave vocal range. When she hits an impossibly high note at the end of the tune, one is reminded of her flawless way with certain songs that are tricky and elusive for some singers.

review

BACKED BY HER husband's sax and clarinet, along with their own five-piece band, Laine did three songs from her current best-selling album ("Let the Music Take You"). The album, recorded with English classical guitarist John Williams, is a warm blend of Laine's voice and Williams' elegant guitar.

A standard for her concerts is "Let the Music Take You," which she always uses to keep fresh with her vocal pyrotechnics.

Reminding the audience that she sang an all-Ellington program the night before at Meadow Brook, she added an Ellington medley that featured her own inimitable stylings of "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" and a crisply swinging "It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing."

To top off an evening of musical delight, McPartland joined Laine at the end for two encore numbers. Finishing the concert with a joyfully swinging "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," the two grand English ladies sent home the crowd of 6,000 as true musical Anglophiles.

outdoor concerts

MEADOW BROOK MUSIC FESTIVAL

At Baldwin Pavilion, Oakland University campus near Rochester. Free parking. Ticket information at 377-2010.

The Rovers, the Kingston Trio

8 p.m. Friday, July 6/1 Pavilion \$16, lawn \$10.50

'60s Salute: Lesley Gore, Lou Christie, the Cliftons, Del Shannon, Danny and the Juniors

8 p.m. Saturday, July 7

Pavilion \$17, lawn \$11

Wayne Newton

8 p.m. Monday, July 9

Pavilion \$22.75, lawn \$18.75

Wynston Marsalis, Carmen McRae

8 p.m. Wednesday, July 11

Pavilion \$16, lawn \$10.50

SUMMER NIGHTS

At Outdoor Courtyard, Troy Hilton, Troy. Cover charge \$5 per person.

Hugh Bordin and the Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band

6 p.m. Friday, July 6

Martha Reeves

7:30 p.m. Saturday, July 7

PINE KNOB MUSIC THEATRE

At Pine Knob in Clarkston. Season ends late September. Tickets at all Ticket World outlets. Pine Knob Hotline 647-7790.

Haye Lewis and the News

7:30 p.m. Thursday, July 5

Pavilion \$14, lawn \$10

Oak Ridge Boys, Lee Greenwood

7:30 p.m. Friday, July 6

Pavilion \$14.50, lawn \$11

The Pointer Sisters, Lee Ritenour

8 p.m. Saturday, July 7

Pavilion \$15, lawn \$10

An Evening with Linda Ronstadt and Nelson Riddle and His Orchestra

8 p.m. Sunday-Monday, July 8-9

Pavilion \$17.50, lawn \$10

30 Special, Night Ranger

7:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 10

Pavilion \$14, lawn \$10

Aerosmith, Orson the Hunter

7:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 11

Pavilion \$15, lawn \$10.

PJAZZ

At Pool Terrace, Hotel Pontchartrain, Detroit. Ticket information at 985-0200, Ext. 3565, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Alexander Zovkie Quintet

6 p.m. Friday, July 6

Reserved \$8, general admission \$6

Pieces of a Dream

6:30 p.m. Monday, July 9

Reserved \$9, general admission \$7

Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band

6 p.m. Wednesday, July 11

Reserved \$9, general admission \$7

NEW CENTER SWINGS

Free concerts in New Center Park at Second Avenue and West Grand Boulevard in Detroit. Free parking. In case of rain, call 872-0188 for concert location.

Loving Cup

5 p.m. Thursday, July 5



The Kingston Trio will perform on a double bill with the Rovers on Friday, July 6, at Meadow Brook Music Festival. Fireworks also will be on the program.

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Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, July 5 & 6.