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Live Jazz: Playboy Jazz Free Concert with Susie Hansen

By Devon Wendell

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On Sunday afternoon and evening, the 2009 Playboy Jazz Festival held its third community concert, free to the public, at Warner Central Park in Woodland Hills. Jazz violinist Susie Hansen took the stage in celebration of the 20th anniversary of her Latin Jazz Band. And it only took a couple of numbers – “No Te Metas Conmigo” and “Suene La Clave” — to get the crowd off their blankets and beach chairs, up and dancing to the infectiously swinging salsa hooks and lavish horn arrangements by David Stout, the vocals by both George Balmeseda and Kaspar Abbo, and the almost telekinetically connected Latin percussion laid down by Papo Rodriguez, Victor Baez, and Tiki Pasillas.

Though the electric violin may not be considered a “typical” Salsa/Latin jazz instrument of choice, Hansen’s strong intonation and the unique and tastefully syncopated phrasing she brought to her melodies stayed true to the music’s rich heritage and history. Even in bold experiments like Bobby Darrin’s “Beyond The Sea” and a medley tribute to Frank Sinatra of “Fly Me To The Moon(Cha Cha),” “The More I See You,” “It Had To be



You”and “All of Me,” Hansen never abandoned the music’s Latin jazz roots. Stellar trombone work by Stout, and Joe Rotondi Jr.’s understated yet complimentary piano stylings were perfect for these adventurous ballad choices.

Hansen and her band closed with a salsa take on the rock n’ roll classic “Vehicle” by The Ides Of March — easily the highlight of the band’s set — laying down an irresistible salsa funk beat, with Hansen and the horn section trading solos while keeping the groove intact.