

L.A. Jazz Scene Article

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“CALIFORNIA JAZZ FOUNDATION ANNUAL GALA – GIVE THE BAND A HAND - HONORS CORKY HALE & MIKE STOLLER”

A lot of fans packed the large banquet room at the beautiful L.A. Hotel Downtown to pay tribute to musician Corky Hale and her husband, songwriter extraordinaire, Mike Stoller. Both have contributed so much to the business of “show business” as well as being generous benefactors for many worthy causes.

The California Jazz Foundation was formed to provide assistance to musicians in need, for medical bills, housing, utilities, food, transportation and more. This event was so well planned and coordinated, everything ran smoothly. Every detail was taken care of so guests could really relax and enjoy the evening. The social hour allowed people to meet and greet, while enjoying a cocktail and looking over the auction items on display. The music was provided by the Foshay Jazz Band (from Foshay Learning Center in South Los Angeles) and wow, were they good! The band was directed by Vince Womack. I counted six women players in the group, so that was a pleasant surprise. Also, I learned later that the Stollers paid the airfare so that this remarkable, young band could travel to Paris for special events. The excellent photographer, Bob Barry, was moving about taking candid photos of guest groupings.

The dinner service in the banquet hall was leisurely and delicious. Some guests were introduced by host LeRoy Downs. One poignant segment was when composer Artie Butler came up and sang the lovely “Here’s To life,” to rousing applause. Later, Sally Kellerman sang “Is That All There Is” which the audience loved. We also found out that Jerry Lieber introduced Mike Stoller to Corky.

Mike Stoller is the famous songwriter/partner of Jerry Lieber, who passed away. The duo are responsible for so many top popular hits such as “Hound Dog,” “Kansas City,” “Charlie Brown,” “Jailhouse Rock,” “Spanish Harlem,” “Stand By Me,” and “Is That All There Is,” among many others. Stoller spoke about their partnership and Lieber’s passing.

Corky Hale has traveled all over the world, playing her harp or piano, with various stars, including Barbra Streisand, Frank Sinatra, Mel Torme, Tony Bennett, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and so many others. The Stollers have been married for 45 years and together they have generously supported many community organizations. The Mike Stoller and Corky Hale-Stoller Civil Rights Memorial Theatre in Montgomery, Alabama honors their support of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Hale was very charming and told some funny anecdotes. She played the piano and sang “Loving You.”

Another highlight of the evening was vocalist Steve Tyrell’s easy going, relaxing style. He was accompanied by a group of top-notch musicians: Quinn Johnson – piano; John Allen –

keyboard; Lyman Medieros – bass; Kevin Winard – drums; Greg Poree – guitar; Ann Patterson – Saxophone, Chris Gray – trumpet and Bob McChesney – trombone.

After the dinner service, auctioneer Mark Schustrin got things hopping as he called out the items for bidding and kept the audience responding. There were some really great items offered, including travel destinations and a bust of Charles Mingus by artist/bass player, John Heard.

The volunteers for this event did a marvelous job of coordinating every little detail. Greg Poree was the Music Director for the evening and Kirk Silsbee wrote the program biographies. My apologies for not getting more names for more thank-yous but this was “a really big show” as the late Ed Sullivan used to say. It was a “really good show!”

Myrna Daniels