

China Forbes, Ari Shapiro, perfect Pink Martini

Pink Martini's China Forbes is back after vocal surgery. At her performance at Seattle's Paramount Theatre Saturday, Dec. 3, she sang more confidently than ever. Ari Shapiro and other guest stars joined her.

By **Michael Upchurch**

Seattle Times arts writer

China Forbes, chanteuse with Portland's "little orchestra" Pink Martini, was in glorious form at the Paramount Theatre Saturday, after a six-month absence from the band due to vocal surgery.

With her opener, "Amado Mio," she hit a smooth, rich sound that kept going all evening. As she told the crowd, "It's fun to sing without a polyp on your vocal chords — it's so freeing!"

In her glittering, silvery sleeveless evening gown, she couldn't have looked more confident or relaxed.

Forbes had plenty of company in this "holiday-esque" show (as band leader Thomas Lauderdale called it). Both sets drew on Pink Martini's seasonal CD, "Joy to the World," an eclectic affair that includes a Chinese New Year song, the original Ukrainian version of "Carol of the Bells" and more familiar holiday selections.

Guest artists Aida Rae Cahana, a Portland cantor, and Ari Shapiro, National Public Radio's White House correspondent, joined Forbes on "Elohai, N'Tzor," a Hebrew prayer, and on "Ocho Kandelikas," a Hanukkah tune served up with a Latin beat,

Radio personality Shapiro was a scene stealer, not just with his singing but his humor. "I *am* Ari Shapiro," he insisted at one point to the crowd, "and you don't look like what I expected either." (For the record, Shapiro is tall, has suave dark looks and wears suits as if he were auditioning for "Mad Men.")

He and Forbes provided the concert highlight with a pair of tunes from PM's "Splendor in the Grass" CD — "And Then You're Gone" (in which Forbes washes her hands of her absentee lover) and "But Now I'm Back" (in which Shapiro tries to talk his way in the door — and also get some cash).

Portland's Pacific Youth Choir upped the Christmas quotient, most impressively with a "Deck the Halls" that took unusually tricky rhythmic twists. The Seattle Symphony, under Eric Garcia, offered dapper string accompaniment. Singer-percussionist Timothy Nishimoto, an underrated Pink Martini asset, had swell moments with "Congratulations" (that Chinese New Year song) and "Dónde Estás, Yolanda?"

But Lauderdale, the moving spirit behind Pink Martini, was the constant source of delight. With his playful keyboard antics, he sometimes looked as if he were going to rocket right off his piano seat — and the tinkling-ivories fun he had with "Santa Baby" was divine.

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