

PALM ²JUPITER

Arts Theatre

Colony Hotel's
Royal Room

P.16

now a top cabaret

ARTS & THEATRE

Colony Hotel's Royal Room now a top cabaret



The Royal Room at the Colony Hotel. Photo by Clay Willis

BY BILL MEREDITH
P2J Contributor

Since opening in 1947, the Colony Hotel in Palm Beach has become well-known for its 90 plush rooms, suites, villas and penthouses; manicured greenery, and close proximity to the shopping smorgasbord that Worth Avenue provides. The hotel has hosted celebrities like Liza Minnelli, Phyllis Diller and George Hamilton; foreign dignitaries like the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and the former King Hussein of Jordan, and even U.S. Presidents George Herbert Walker Bush and Bill Clinton.

Since December of 2001, The Colony has also become well-known for its Royal Room, now regarded as one of top cabaret venues in the country. Nestled between the hotel's lobby and its Polo Steakhouse, the interior music

venue and supper club features an intimate stage, house lights and sound equipment, excellent acoustics, sound baffles, and 20 tables with seating capacity for 90 people. Featured entertainers have ranged from veterans Jack Jones, Ben Vereen and Ann Hampton Callaway to rising stars Peter Cincotti, Maude Maggart and Tony DeSare.

Trumpeted as "Palm Beach's First Post-War Hotel" in a 1954 newspaper ad, The Colony added the Royal Room because of the instincts of Roger Everingham, the hotel's vice president and general manager for the past 11 years.

"I've been to the New York cabaret rooms regularly," Everingham says, "from the Oak Room at the Algonquin and Feinstein's at the Regency to the Cafe Carlyle. The Royal Room was a banquet room before, and received very little use. But I liked its arches, and the circular cove at one end was perfect for a stage. Those architec-

tural features were already here, but we added chandeliers and changed the decor to improve it. It's small, but it works. The intimacy translates into energy between the performer and the audience."

It's mid-afternoon on a weekday in late December at The Colony, and a dozen or so guests are sunbathing by the pool. Others trickle for an indoor or pool deck lunch at the Polo Steakhouse, where Rod Stewart often dines. But a few weeks earlier, the view was much more crowded. On Nov. 30, the hotel celebrated the Royal Room's 10th anniversary with a sprawling party that featured Cincotti and Avery Sommers, plus regular Polo Steakhouse entertainers Memory Lane and Rich and Jill Switzer.

"We had around 300 people pass through that night," Everingham says. "We'd realized that the room would be too small for the crowds, so we opened

the doors and let people pass through into the lobby and the Polo Steakhouse. It was quite an evening."

Along with the hotel's director of entertainment, Rob Russell, Everingham oversees the behind-the-scenes work that translates into the Royal Room's cabaret calendar. Russell is also a singer, and

has an encyclopedic knowledge of American Songbook lyrics, making him the venue's perfect host.

"Rob Russell's sheer joy and enthusiasm as a host is matched by the most glamorous room in that most glamorous town in America, Palm Beach," says vocalist and Royal Room frequenter Andrea Marcovicci. "Some of my fondest memories as a singer are of The Colony. Where else can you hobnob poolside all day, shop at Sak's, and sing for high society all night?"

"Rob Russell and The Colony Hotel have created a truly world class ven-

ARTS & THEATRE



Colony Hotel General Manager Roger Everingham.

ue at the Royal Room," says DeSare, "which feels just as warm, inviting and sophisticated to the performers as it does to its audiences."

Everingham feels that the hotel's business is on an upswing after suffering through the lengthy economic downturn -- a recession that didn't affect the Royal Room nearly as much.

"A lot of people felt that Palm Beach was bullet-proof from an economic meltdown," he says, "but that's not true. The Royal Room did well throughout, but the revenue for the hotel declined significantly over the past two years. The phones have started ringing more recently, so we're guardedly optimistic."

A look through the Royal Room's list of more than 100 performers over the past decade reveals several notable jazz artists: the piano-and-vocal team of Bill Charlap and Sandy Stewart; singing pianists Dena DeRose, Patti Wicks and Freddy Cole (Nat King Cole's brother), clarinetist Ken Peplowski, vocalist Allan Harris, bassist Jay Leonhart, and guitarists Bucky and John Pizzarelli. Even pianist Marian McPartland, the now 92-year-old British icon who hosts the National Public Radio program [i]Piano Jazz[i], has played at the Royal Room.

"Marian McPartland was here several years ago," Everingham says. "Over the years, Rob Russell and I have come to realize that cabaret works better than jazz in the Royal Room. The two styles may have the American Songbook in common, but I think the difference is that cabaret performers generally have a more cohesive act."

A few obvious names pop up among Everingham's favorite Royal Room performers since 2001, but some lesser-known artists do as well.

"Jack Jones is in his early 70s now," he says, "but he still has the pipes. He may be the greatest American singer alive today. Ann Hampton Callaway is a great entertainer, singer and raconteur. She'll ask her audience to shout out phrases, and when she gets three or four, she'll put them together within a song. It's very clever, because some are very unorthodox, but they never stump her. I've seen her do it 10 times or so."

"Steve Tyrell, who's here for all of March, is our biggest draw," Everingham continues. "He'll not only fill the room, but he'll fill the bandstand with seven or eight musicians and backup singers. Marilyn Maye is also a class act who's mastered the art of the small stage. She took some time off to raise a family before coming back. Baby Jane Dexter is also a captivating performer, and can bring an audience to tears. And Peter Cincotti, who was only 18 years old when he was first here, and has since become a star."

Everingham also remembers the first time that Maggart, the older sister of pop star Fiona Apple, performed at the Royal Room eight years ago.

"She arrived on a bicycle with a backpack," he says with a laugh. "But she was probably still in college, or just out of college, at the time."

Maggart, who decided to become a cabaret singer after seeing a show by Marcovicci, now draws celebri-

ties like actor Philip Seymour Hoffman and radio host Garrison Keillor -- who's featured the singer twice on his National Public Radio program [i]

A Prairie Home Companion[i]. Maggart has been back to the Royal Room three times since her debut, and has become a fan.

"I love that room," she said after her latest two-weekend stop last June, "and hope to perform there again as soon as possible."

The Royal Room recently featured runs by Sommers, Cincotti, Tony Sandler, the Four Freshmen, and a debut performance on New Year's Eve by Clint Holmes, who'll appear through Jan. 15.

Marcovicci returns on Jan. 18-29; Will & Anthony Nunziata on Feb. 1-5, Maye on Feb. 8-12, Callaway on Feb. 15-19, Jones on Feb. 22-26, and then Tyrell plays for nearly a month from March 1-26. Christine Ebersole & John Oddo make their debut from March 29-April 9, and Marilyn McCoo & Billy Davis Jr. return from April 12-23, all at the Royal Room at the Colony Hotel, 155 Hammon Ave. in Palm Beach.

Dinner tickets for the Tuesday-Saturday shows cost \$100-145 per person, with show-only tickets priced at \$55-100 per person, and are available by calling the the box office (561-659-8100) or visiting www.thecolonypalmbeach.com. ■

THE MALTZ JUPITER THEATRE PRESENTS

Perfect for the entire family!

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

ROYAL ROOM and CALIFORNIA CLOSETTY

Sing along to the classics: Do-Re-Mi Edelweiss My Favorite Things So Long, Farewell and more!

ASK ABOUT THE \$15 STUDENT GROUP RATE!

January 11 - 30

Chris MacDonald's MEMORIES OF ELVIS Celebrating Presley's Life and Music

January 16 - 8:00pm

Box Office: (561) 575-2223
Group Sales: (561) 972-6117
www.jupitertheatre.org 1001 East Washington Road • Jupiter, FL 33417