***An Evening with Ali Harper***

As a venue, the Foyer of the Ashburton Trust Event Centre lends itself superbly to Cabaret performances and an evening with the vivacious Ali Harper was proof that this is so. The audience settled themselves at the (almost too large?) circular tables, relaxed into the evening with the aid of mellow lighting and thoroughly enjoyed the musical soiree.

Recently, Ali had visited our town as a cast member of ‘Oklahoma’ and prior to that had starred in ‘Bombshells’. Playing the role of Donna in Mama Mia was a delight for Ali as she revelled in the character she was portraying. Those who attend performances at The Court Theatre will have seen Ali on many occasions. This lady is an extremely versatile performer, able to achieve immediate audience rapport within opening bars of the first song. With flawless piano accompaniment during the evening provided by Richard Marrett, Ali opened her programme with a bracket of songs from My Fair Lady. This was a cleverly planned strategy…capturing the audience with well known material. Interspersed with songs, were snippets of Ali’s involvement in music during the last twenty years. At the age of nineteen, Ali toured throughout New Zealand with West End stars, performing in the musical Chess. Twenty years later she can boast of having strong ties with the music scene in New York.

Next month Ali will present ‘Bombshells’ at the prestigious United Solo Festival, followed by ‘Down Under Diva’ at the well known Metropolitan room in NYC. Whilst in New York, Ali is hopeful of meeting her idol Doris Day ( incidentally 90 years of age very soon) . Such is Ali’s passion for Doris and all that she stood for, a one woman show entitled ‘A Doris Day Special’ is at present in the making with Ali preparing to tour the show in the near future.

Ali’s interpretations of songs such as Evergreen, Diamonds are Forever, Songbird and Shadow of your Smile were the essence of what the evening was all about- an opportunity for Ali to showcase her individuality in the best possible way. Her ability to use acting skills as she sings serves only to enhance what is already world class entertainment. Two male audience members would doubtless have returned home feeling quite light hearted after their short encounters with the songstress…one had been informed he was ‘Mr Right’ and the other danced nimbly across the floor with Ali as she sang Hernando’s Hideaway.

An audience favourite was ‘Barbie’s got it All’. How Ali managed to squeeze so many words into a bar of music, I have yet to fathom.

‘The Winner Takes it All’ ended a brilliant evening and Ali was indeed that…a winner.

**Moyra Whiting – Ashburton**

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