

## Ella & Joe at The Bay of Islands Golf Club, Kerikeri Saturday, 17 May 2025

### Presenting:

Ali Harper (vocals), Harry Harrison (guitar).

### Performing:

A tribute to Ella Fitzgerald (1917 – 1996) and Joe Pass (1929 – 1994), including:

- i. *Almost like being in love*
- ii. *Ain't misbehavin'*
- iii. *The nearness of you*
- iv. *They can't take that away from me*
- v. *A tisket, a tasket*
- vi. *I may be wrong (but I think you are wonderful)*
- vii. *Misty*
- viii. *Route 66*
- ix. *The lady is a tramp*
- x. *Secret love*
- xi. *Georgia*
- xii. *The boy from Ipanema*
- xiii. *Mack the Knife*
- xiv. *Dancing cheek to cheek*
- xv. *I've got the world on a string*
- xvi. *Accentuate the positive*

Only now and then does one get to hear something special that delights and exceeds expectations like this did.

The Golf Club's pavilion provided a relaxed setting for a catered evening of food, wine and entertainment. Aroha Music Society, in collaboration with the Kerikeri Jazz Club, presented a gala tribute to the legendary singer Ella Fitzgerald and celebrated guitarist Joe Pass, both of whom enjoyed long and distinguished careers in the upper echelons of the world of song and jazz, during a time when song was about beautiful voices, clever lyrics and skilful accompaniment, untainted by sophisticated electronic effects.

Together, Fitzgerald and Pass recorded six albums during their thirteen-year musical partnership that flourished between 1973 and 1986. In their heydays, Fitzgerald was heralded as America's "first lady of song", and Pass was esteemed as one of the greatest jazz guitarists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A tribute to these celebrities has a very high bar to cross.

Christchurch based Ali Harper and Harry Harrison have distinguished careers as entertainers in their own rights and have been performing together for over twenty years. Their style is intimate and informal, and played almost as a bio, with snippets of their lives woven into Harper's animated intros to each piece, along with interesting and relevant information about the song selection and some enjoyable banter between the singer and guitarist.

The performance opened with a warm and personable introduction from Harper, whose quirky but elegant gestures signalled that we were all here to relax and have fun, so just sit back and enjoy the show.

Harper's expressive voice, both in speech and in song, was versatile – entrancing, beautiful, melodic and packed with nuanced mood changes, playful humour and dramatic nostalgia. Her diction was immaculate and crystal clear, and her intonation precise. Highs or lows, loud or soft, rises or falls, she was simply divine. Harrison's accompaniment was solid and respectful of the vocalist's limelight, although she generously gave him plenty of opportunity for solo improvisations with licks and riffs of his own woven through the melody, in keeping with his role as Joe Pass' tribute, carrying melody, harmony and bass lines simultaneously. It was easy to see why their performance partnership endures as long as it has. They are a class act.

Judging from audience reaction, their well-chosen selection of highlights from Fitzgerald's recordings was a big hit, and the pair maintained high energy, humour and full engagement throughout their generous and varied programme. Following the interval, Harper spotted an erstwhile iconic New Zealand singer and yodeller in the audience, and put the hapless octogenarian on the spot to do an impromptu rendition, to everyone's delight.

Excitement was running high after the final number, and the clamour for an encore was rewarded. A beautiful rendition of *Someone to Watch Over Me* concluded the evening on a tender and sentimental note, leaving a healthy appetite for more another day. Let's watch and see what they come up with next.

Aroha Music Society would like to thank Ali Harper, Harry Harrison, The Kerikeri Jazz Club and Chamber Music New Zealand for making this enjoyable performance possible.

**Review by Bruce Carlsson**