

# Grand Rapids Press

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## Scorching Scat to Touching Zevon tribute, Mammina Really Delivers

By Gary Artman

### MUSICREVIEW

It certainly was a good sign, early on the night, and things only got better from there.

All the seats at the downtown nightspot One Trick Pony were taken a full hour before the start of Monday's Hat Trick Concert Series benefit starring singing sensation Jenna Mammina.

The closer it came to opening Monday's show, a fund-raiser sponsored by community radio station WYCE-FM (88.1), the more people crowded into the place. Even standing room became a hot property.

All for good reason, too, as Mammina graced the opening night of the fall 2003 series with a great night of wide-ranging vocal music and nightclub-style entertainment.

It was interesting from the start. During her first number, a fire truck roared past with horn and sirens blaring, causing the Michigan native to ask if she were in New York City, where she does much of her performing these days.

After that odd start, the folk/jazz artist ignited a fire of her own, delivering a sizzling set of original works, inspired covers and standards. Everyone seemed captivated from song-one, in fact, which was a pleasing number called "Moment's Magic."

Accompanied by Chris Siebold on guitar and Tim Fox on upright bass, Mammina took her listeners on a unique and entertaining musical journey. Eschewing the static pose of being planted at a mike stand, she held her microphone near and dear, making it an emotional, musical extension of herself.

Many times she became a fan, too, sitting back while Siebold and Fox provided astounding instrumentals that enhanced the evening's magic.

Mammina's set list was varied and thoughtful. A significant portion of her songs were covers from the likes of Steely Dan, Elvis Costello and Duke Ellington, and she made all of them her own in one way or another. When she sang "Accidentally Like a Martyr" as a tribute to the edgy singer-songwriter Warren Zevon, who died Sunday, her grief and gratitude were palpable, moving many in the audience, and herself, to tears.

Not that everything was heartbreaking. On the contrary, Mammina, whose next album is due out in early '04, proved to be an engaging and witty host, improvising vocal scat through many of her songs, most notably when she delighted the audience with a quick version of her Scat for the Cats music program that she presents to schools and other groups. She asked the audience for five random words -- they chose fabulous, bodacious, okra, sandwich, Zevon -- and proceeded to create a song on the spot, with flawless accompaniment by Siebold and Fox.

She performed a number of her own tunes as well, closing the show with her "Contradictions," a sweet, soulful tune carrying a message of hope and a fine sentiment on which to close a beautiful evening.

Michael Packer of WYCE, which helped establish the Hat Trick Series, said the shows have been well-received from the start.

"Not only do we get to bring amazing musicians to Grand Rapids, we also get to raise awareness and funds for great organizations around the area," he said.

Grand Rapids resident Tom Sprik, a fan of the series since its start, said he keeps coming back because "This series brings a lot of great talents undiscovered by the mainstream, which I like, (and) the fund-raising aspect is great as well."

The recipient of Monday's benefit show was the nonprofit Heritage Theatre Group, which is presenting "A Man for All Seasons" starting Oct. 2.

Western Michigan University student Annamarie Sisson came from Kalamazoo for the evening to catch Mammina's show.

"She played in one of my college classes, (and) she was so good, I had to see her again," Sisson said.

Dan Verhil, owner of One Trick Pony, said he always enjoys hosting the series: "It is a great experience. More often than not, I walk away thinking, "Why haven't I heard that person before?"

After Monday's it's a safe bet many more left thinking the same thing about Mammina.

For more information about the singer, her album catalog and touring plans, go online to [www.jennamammina.com](http://www.jennamammina.com).