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The Conya Doss Concert Review:

By JALA KHATEEB

Contributing Writer

Def Comedy Jam meets Neo-sultry sounds at the Park Room (formerly the Baby Grand) Saturday night. Opening the music set with a deep, old-school sound, Tasha and her troupe of ladies set the tone for what was to be a high-energy night. Voice booming through the mic, she took us aback with a mix of tasteful choreography like a scene out of “Sparkle.” Courtney G, infamous for his in-your-face standup, kept the crowd belly-up in between acts; even taking a moment to serenade the crowd with an impromptu remix of John Legend’s “Ordinary People.”

Cleveland showed proof of its raw talent with R.Y.A.N. (Said as it’s spelled) and his Kamikaze style neo-hip-hop laced with a smooth R&B undertone. Now on his second album, R.Y.A.N. gave the crowd more than what they anticipated. His tribute to Dr. King in “March Like a King” (opened with a poem by Bianca Michelle of the Griot Project), spoke to a diverse group –connecting rhyme with reason. With a likeness to hip-hop artist Common, his style remained distinct and his delivery consistent –keeping the crowd hype and wanting more. Brandi Booth, on keys and guitar, took to the mic like a Hummingbird, performing her solo “Don’t Rush” with unquestionable stage presence. Back-up vocals from Brandy Ali and fellow band members -Kevin Phillips on drums, Titus Golden on bass and Napoleon SteveWil on keys- benevolently set the stage for Conya Doss. Individual artists in their own right, the collective harmony they brought left an impression on anyone in ear-shot.

The crowd didn’t hesitate to get to their feet when Doss and her talented vocalists took the floor. Pushing through a few tech issues, Doss didn’t skip a beat. With a contagious smile and vibrant energy, she took her time crooning to her Cleveland fan base; shouting out her former Cleveland School of the Arts classmates sitting in the front row. Her band and back-up singers kept the tempo fun and upbeat, engaging with her and matching her enthusiasm. Doss ended the night with her latest single “Don’t Change,” off the new album “Pocket Full of Purpose” – which some say has a sound similar to songstress Jill Scott – available on iTunes.

Afterward, Ms. Doss took the time to answer a few questions:

How does it feel performing for folks back home?

[It's] really good. Cleveland can be a tough crowd. Many artists in the industry outside of Cleveland say the same thing. We will show you love, but you have to work for it! My supporters are true supporters.
I can't say that I don't get love from home. Cleveland is my home. I don't know any other place.

Do you feel you are where you want to be musically?

Definitely, even more so than I thought. Believe it or not I'm shy and never [really] thought about being in the forefront. I wanted to teach or go to dental school; but I began singing and things progressed this way.

What's your favorite song off your new album "Pocket Full of Purpose"?

My favorite song on this album is "Come Back Jamie." Initially we thought about using the name Amy but when [British Singer] Amy Winehouse passed away we thought it'd be inappropriate so we changed it to Jamie. It's about people who get caught up on the scene [the industry] and the need for them to come back down and reflect on how they got there –taking a step back to look at their circumstance. Musically though, my favorite is [the new single] "Don't Change".

Some people have compared your sound to the likeness of Jill Scott. How do you respond?

I always get that. It can be a good thing and sometimes it can work against you. If I want to get a booking somewhere, someone may say I'm too much like this artist or that and in that way it's not [a good thing]. But then it also says a lot that my sound gets compared to the likeness of someone in such a respected place in their career. I just have to remain true to myself.

What words of wisdom do you have for aspiring artists?

Stay true to your music. If it's your true craft, it'll surface. You also have to surround yourself with positive people who have your best interest at heart. In Cleveland, for instance, we need stronger camaraderie. We need to look out for each other and build a stronger network. I love my city; we just have to do more to support each other.

Her tour doesn't stop in Cleveland but continues throughout Ohio and other cities along the East Coast, giving her hometown more to look forward to. Music samples and tour information can be found on her website at www.conyadoss.com