

BWW REVIEWS: BUIKA'S UNDENIABLE VOCAL TALENT SHINES AT STRATHMORE

By: Jennifer Perry

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This weekend, Concha Buika's colorful personality and passionate music filled the Music Center at Strathmore just outside of Washington, DC and then some. Better known to world music fans by her stage name "Buika," the Latin Grammy Award-winning singer and Grammy Award nominee's unique style borrows the best of African music, Spanish flamenco, and more. She's certainly one-of-a-kind - something she proved to the appreciative audience.

Backed by an exceptionally tight and musically gifted band - Yadam González on bass, the precise Vahagn Turogotyan on guitar, and the superb Ramón Porrina on the cajón flamenco - she made a musical impression from the beginning to the end. To simply say that her vocals were powerful would be an understatement. She exhibited a beautiful blend of not only vocal power and vocal control, but also raw and intense emotions as she took on numerous songs about love, loss, and other universal themes/human conditions. Of her many songs exploring these themes and more, "Soledad," "Santa Lucía," and "Sueño con ella," were among those that best leveraged Buika's powerful emotions and skillful voice to the greatest extent and brought me back to the semester I spent studying and living in the Andalucía region of Spain.

While the combination of Buika's vocals and the band's skillful playing proved to be a winning one - made even more fun to experience due to the rapport they had with one another - there were moments in the concert that weren't so winning for me. There's no doubt that Buika has a naturally quirky and charming personality to spare as evidenced by the way she engaged with her fellow musicians and the audience. She's also prone to wearing her heart on her sleeve. Both are good things. However, at times her often lengthy patter - dealing with her romantic woes, her child, her feelings about music, time, and pretty much everything else - bordered on awkward and even treaded into the vulgar and downright uncomfortable territory. Less than ideal discussions about race and sex were probably best left to an intimate set late at night in a bar than a 7 PM Sunday night show in a stately concert venue particularly in this area of the world.

While I fully appreciate the laidback approach she took to presenting her music and her insistence on the audience sharing that journey with her in an inviting and relaxed environment, these numerous non-singing moments definitely got to be a little grating. A little bit of that goes a long way especially when one is that talented and can rely on those skills to make an audience take notice.

While not as much of a problem as the patter, I also would have appreciated a bit more variety in her set. While her song selections were undoubtedly ones that spoke to her - judging by her obvious connection with the lyrics and the melody - they did begin to sound the same after a while. Including a few quieter selections to balance out the high-flying vocal fireworks moments would have been a nice touch, recognizing of course that a lot of her music is based out of the flamenco world, which is not exactly known for its delicateness. Still, because Buika's music is influenced by a variety of styles, I do think it is possible to present her versatility better in a live concert format.

Quibbles aside, there's little doubt Buika's vocal prowess is undeniable.
Running Time: 1 hour and 40 minutes with no intermission.

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