

Superb international singer Jarocka transcends language

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REVIEW

ALBANY — International songstress Irena Jarocka charmed a sizeable audience in her Capital Region debut at the Polish-American Community Center on Saturday night.

A native of Poland, where hers is a household name, Jarocka has lived in the United States for four years and in Clifton Park for the past six months.

Most of those in the audience seemed to have Polish backgrounds, but to this reviewer Jarocka's performance was proof that music and art can transcend any existing language barriers.

A few of the songs on the program were rendered in English and French, but most were sung in Polish, of which I understand not a word.

It didn't matter.

Jarocka is one of those rare individuals with an inborn ability to entertain and she generates the passion in a song in so many ways, one doesn't need to understand the words.

Hey, they're all about love, anyway, right?

Jarocka's voice is pure gold to begin with and she knows how to use it. On ballads it is as warm and mellow as Karen Carpenter's and on up-tempo songs she can belt out lyrics the way rockers like Pat Benatar can.

Much of an Irena Jarocka concert is visual and there are a lot of well-known singers in this country who could learn something from her about

how to communicate with an audience and put a song across.

I've never seen a singer — of any style — who has more poise or who knows how to move better or more naturally.

Jarocka has an uncanny sense of timing and her songs are punctuated with movement and gesture, but nothing she does seems artificial or contrived.

She opened with a song called "Witajcie W Moim Swiecie" ("Welcome to My World") and followed that with a song the audience responded to as soon as it began, one of her biggest hits, "Gondolierzy Znad Wisley" ("Vistula Gondoliers").

She closed the first portion of her concert with a stellar performance of "Umbrellas of Cherbourg," which she sang in French.

On the second half she gave an alluring performance of "Motylem Jestem" ("I Am a Butterfly") and followed that with the biggest hit of the concert — a passionate version of a very dramatic song called "Tylko Mnie Popros Do Tanca" ("Just Ask Me to Dance").

Her program also included the country hit, "Queen of Hearts" and "Unforgettable," which she delivered in English.

The singer was joined in this concert by another musician from her homeland, Andrzej Zielinski.



Irena Jarocka performed at the Polish-American Community Center on Saturday night.

A composer and singer, Zielinski is also an expert on keyboards. He sings with a strong pop/rock voice and he joined Jarocka vocally and as an accompanist on several songs.

This was the first concert of this type in the Community Center.

If they have more, they need to figure out how to change the lighting without having a guy walking around the stage pushing and pulling plugs in the wall — or at least get a smaller guy to do it.