

The Capital Grille and Johnny Mathis - A night of good food, good music and good friends

Written by By TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
Monday, 22 August 2011 11:12



The stars aligned Saturday night to present gifts beyond imagination. Even the searing 109° heat did not diminish what the universe had in store for Carol and John Allen, Sue Ann and Benny Johnson and me.

Sue Ann and Benny had won dinner for two in the *News-Telegram's* "Romantic Evening" contest that also included tickets to see Johnny Mathis in concert at the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center.

Sue Ann had faith they would win, but Benny wasn't so sure.



"Since we didn't know if we would win and if we won, where our seats would be, I decided to purchase second row seats for Susie as her 43rd wedding anniversary present," Benny explained.

A series of events, including an equine rescue on Monday, a radio auction and some cards falling into place, resulted in our party of five heading to Dallas for dinner and a show.

Our perfect evening began at The Capital Grille in Dallas. From the moment we stepped in the library-like space on Maple Avenue, the staff at the Grille made us welcome and treated us like family. While the Grille is one of a national chain of steak houses, there is no "head 'em up, run 'em through" mentality in the Dallas location. While you're a guest at the Grille, you're encouraged to relax, wind down and enjoy each moment of your dining experience.

When there's an event scheduled in the arts district, the Grille offers an "Arts Menu." The menu includes choice of salad or clam chowder, creamed spinach and garlic mashed potatoes, chicken, salmon or two cuts of dry-aged beef and a choice of crème brûlée or flourless

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chocolate cake for the pre-fixe price of \$50, excluding beverages, tax and gratuity.

“I've eaten in some very nice restaurants in my time,” Dr. Allen said after tasting his entree. “This is the best filet I've ever had.”

In addition to the fabulous food, the Grille offers some of the best service in the city. Catherine Brownfield took care of us in a spectacular way, considering the restaurant was booked for 500 guests Saturday night.

The Grille's manager, Gloria Starling, stopped by the table several times to make sure we had everything we needed. I don't think it's a stretch to say that every one of us will return for another serving of the Capital Grille's excellence.



We then made our way to the Meyerson, found our seats and settled in to hear Johnny Mathis, one of the music world's most successful artists. He's sold over 350,000,000 records during his 60-year career.

Backed by musicians from the Dallas Symphony, along with several members of his own combo, the Gilmer native was welcomed with a long, warm standing ovation – before he ever hit one note.

And, no one could have guessed his opening number. No one.

“We Need a Little Christmas” was Mathis doing what he could to break the grip of this brutal heat wave.

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Charming.

For the next 90 minutes, Mathis and Company enchanted the faithful with hits like “When I Fall In Love,” “Two for the Road,” “Moon River,” “Chances Are,” “It's Not for Me to Say,” “Baubles, Bangles and Beads,” “It's All in the Game” and “Secret Love.”



Highlights of the set list included a lush, lonely cover of the Beatles' tune “Yesterday” and a particularly emotional turn on “99 Miles from L.A.,” which showcased Mathis' ability to get behind the lyrics and share something very special with his audience. As he delivered the last plaintive line, “Please be there,” no one moved. It was an amazing moment.

Of course, Mathis' signature song, “Misty,” first recorded in 1959, was in the mix. Could he still come in on that high note after the first break? Of course, he could. He's Johnny Mathis, after all. He sailed in over the top of the orchestra like it's something he does before breakfast every day. And the crowd rewarded him with generous applause.

What makes Mathis, at nearly 76, so remarkable is that he's as much in control of his voice as he was at the height of his popularity in the 1960s. He's in great shape – he loves golf – and he's obviously taken advantage of the extensive vocal training he received as a young man to keep his pipes polished and ready to go.

One of the other things he's done to ensure a long run is to surround himself with musicians he trusts. His acoustic guitar player, Gill Wright, has been with him for 42 years. Their acoustic cover of “Let It Be Me” showed perfect synchronization. The two also offered up some magic moments during “99 Miles from L.A.” I believe the bass player's been part of the Mathis entourage for 30 years.

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It's also obvious that Mathis' conductor, John Scott Lavender, has worked diligently to provide rich, textured orchestrations to showcase Mathis' velvet voice. Together, the artists made it look easy.

We were invited to go backstage after the show. Mathis was gracious, taking time with each visitor – including golfing great Kathy Whitworth.

Joining us for the meet-and-greet were Barbara and Mickey McKenzie, who had come to the city for the show.



Sue Ann showed Mathis a copy of a July 23 copy of the *News-Telegram* with his pre-show interview. He thanked her and tucked the edition under his arm.

Then, as only Sue Ann could, she asked, “Would you like me for me to autograph it for you?”

“Of course,” Mathis answered.

The legend and one of his most loyal fans shared a spontaneous giggle.

It was the perfect way to end a perfect evening of good food, good music and good fellowship.