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## **Soprano hits the highs with ease, grace**

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**Special to the Journal Sentinel**

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When soprano Kathleen Battle sings, people listen.

Battle brought an Artist Series at the Pabst audience to its feet Tuesday evening, singing with the musical artistry, vocal polish and dramatic sense for which she is known.

She made time stand still as she soared through high spots in Joaquín Turina's "Te Pupila es Azul," and mingled love song and lullaby in Xavier Montsalvatge's "Cancion de Cuna para dormir a un Negrito (Ninghe, ninghe, ninghe)."

The magic of Battle's high range has never been entirely about the altitude of the notes she hits, but about the ease, finesse and grace with which she handles them. That artistry - a delicate decrescendo at the end of Franz Liszt's "Die Lorelei" and an absolutely exquisite, lilting delivery of Felix Mendelssohn's "Auf Flugeln des Gesanges" - are still in full force in her voice.

The evening's program included four poetically handled Schubert Lieder and three chansons by Faure, including a wonderfully tender rendition of "Notre amour."

Battle's ability to shape a phrase is unparalleled. She puts lyrics and their meaning at center stage and brings just enough drama to each selection to convey its meaning in a manner that transcends the language of the lyrics.

Sometimes though, she gives her lyrics a simple poignant thrust, as she did in an a cappella rendition of "Were You There (When They Crucified My Lord)."

Battle is, of course, the real deal in the diva department. When latecomers and clappers who wouldn't quit created a distraction after her first number, she left the stage and returned when things were quiet.

Battle's opening numbers, three selections by Purcell, were delivered with impeccable pitch and diction, but with a cautious reserve that disappeared as the program progressed. A bit of unevenness in her middle register sound reappeared throughout the program.

Accompanied sensitively by pianist Ted Taylor, Battle made frequent checks of lyric sheets positioned beside her on the piano. That movement, when it occurred in mid-phrase, redirected her sound somewhat awkwardly toward the piano lid.

Battle commented on the beauty and long history of the Pabst Theater, singing an encore of the spiritual, "Over My Head, I Hear Music," in homage to the performers who have played the theater in the past. She gave a final encore of Puccini's "O mio babbino caro."

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