

---

## Oldies shine bright in 'A Night of Stars' at Hanover

By Kevin T. Baldwin Telegram & Gazette REVIEWER

**WORCESTER** — "We might be oldies, but we're goodies."

That's what original Platters frontman Virgil S. Gibson told the audience at The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts Saturday night, and he was absolutely right as he and other stars continuously wowed the audience during the four-plus-hour "Celebrity Gala: A Night of Stars."

The crooner had the audience absolutely mesmerized from the very second he began to sing his catalog of standards, including "Only You," "Under the Boardwalk," "The Great Pretender" and "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." His voice was as crisp and pure as when he sang the tunes he helped make famous 40-plus years ago, earning him not only a standing ovation from the audience but also enthusiastic applause from the seven-piece house band that played for the night's entertainers.

Mr. Gibson also entertained the crowd with a new song off his spiritual album, "Prayers Have Wings."

Performing separately, Connie Stevens and daughters Joely Fisher and Tricia Leah Fisher each made best use of the band during the evening, with songs ranging from rousing country songs to emotional pop ballads. Tricia Leah Fisher and her husband, actor-musician Byron Thames, harmonized particularly well on the song "Johnny and June," in which Mr. Thames showed great prowess on the piano. Mr. Thames also played in the band for Ms. Stevens and other acts.

"Til Death" star Joely Fisher performed a fiery rendition of Van Morrison's "Moondance," followed by "Glory of Love," which started soft but built to a dramatic climax. Ms. Fisher finished her set with the poignant Barry Manilow-penned ballad "When October Goes" (which Manilow completed for the late Johnny Mercer).

John Byner and fellow comedian-emcee Norm Crosby equally entertained the crowd with humor that was not only funny but clean.

Mr. Byner regaled the audience with his repertoire of impeccable impersonations, which included John Wayne, James Cagney, Ed Sullivan, Walter Brennan, Jackie Mason, Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable, Lawrence Welk, Dean Martin and Rodney Dangerfield.

Mr. Byner had microphone problems at the start of his act and had to have the microphone removed from his clothing. Being a true professional, he worked the problem into the routine by doing a hysterical "strip tease," then ordered a technician helping him to take the mic home "and bury it."

The evening's festivities, co-sponsored in part both by The Hanover Theatre and Carroll Enterprises, began with introductions by U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern, D-Worcester, and U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's widow, Victoria Kennedy. She welcomed the audience by reminding everyone that the evening was intended as a fundraiser for St. John's Food for the Poor Center at 44 Temple St., of which Frank Carroll, the event's organizer, has been a staunch supporter for years. According to "Mighty Joe Young" actress Terry Moore and son Grant Cramer, St. John's has been "serving the community poor for 177 years."

Ms. Moore and Mr. Cramer then introduced an extremely humorous film showing Mr. Carroll literally shining the shoes of Lt. Gov. Timothy P. Murray, Mayor Joseph C. O'Brien and other famous names in an effort to raise money for the evening's cause, and showing how "Every Dollar Counts."

Famous Irish tenor John McDermott charmed the crowd by performing three songs quite appropriate to the evening's theme of trying to help people become more aware of the needy. Mr. McDermott began with the poignant "Hello in There" by singer-songwriter John Prine, about old age and loneliness. He followed that with "The Dreamer," a song about hunger that he dedicated to Mr. Kennedy, from his "Journeys" CD. He finished his set with his signature song, "Danny Boy," and the combination of tunes left very few dry eyes in the house.

Eighty-eight-year-old performer Anne Jeffreys amazed the crowd with her vibrant medley of songs from "The King and I," receiving what Norm Crosby called a "standing ovulation" from the crowd (Mr. Crosby's signature comedy comes from the mispronunciation of certain words). Her standing ovation was much deserved.

Many in the crowd clapped and sang along with her closing rendition of "Shall We Dance," which brought out Mr. McDermott in a surprise appearance to dance with and kiss the hand of Ms. Jeffreys.

Actor Joseph Bologna ("Blame it on Rio") and his wife, actress and "Nanny" star Renee Taylor, performed a hilarious skit for the crowd that was followed by a four-song set by the legendary Theodore Bikel, 87, who played guitar while accompanied by conductor Tamara Brooks on the piano.

"What a wonderful thing Frank Carroll has put together here," Mr. Bikel said before he launched into his set, which included "If I Were a Rich Man" from "Fiddler on the Roof" and "Edelweiss," which he explained was written especially for him during his original run of "The Sound of Music" with Mary Martin. "Edelweiss" had the audience singing along from the moment Mr. Bikel began to sing.

Although the event, which began at 7:36 p.m., was running well past 11 p.m., Connie Stevens reinvigorated the crowd by lighting up the stage with her final set, which included the songs "Lady Love Me (One More Time)," "You Give Good Love," and "Somebody Like You," along with a short film Ms. Stevens had made especially for veterans.

Ms. Stevens concluded the evening with "On My Own" before Mr. Carroll joined her onstage with the Rev. John Madden of St. John's Catholic Church. The two men, along with other organizers of the event, concluded the evening's festivities with Mr. Carroll imploring the audience to continue supporting St. John's Food for the Poor program and its mission "to deliver sustenance and dignity to the poor and homeless men, women, and children in our community."