

California teaming

By Jay Lustig/The Star-Ledger

On one level, the theme of Thursday's concert at the Count Basie Theatre was California: The Jersey Shore Rock-N-Soul Revue performed Golden State-generated pop and rock hits of the '60s and '70s.

On a deeper level, it was about rebirth.

This was the first show at the Red Bank theater since it closed for four months for an extensive \$8 million renovation -- a "dream come true," in the words of Revue leader Bob Bandiera, who has performed at the theater countless times (mostly with the Revue and as a member of Southside Johnny's Asbury Jukes). The plasterwork on the inside of the theater has been restored and repainted, the bars have been replaced, and there is new lighting and carpeting, for starters.

The Basie, built in 1926, had been dingy for decades. Now it feels elegant again.

So it was perfectly fitting that the Revue capped its show with two of the most celebratory songs of the hippie era: "Dance to the Music" and "I Want To Take You Higher," both originally recorded by Sly and the Family Stone. The Revue, a 14-piece group for this show, generated a big, appropriately ecstatic sound for this part of the evening.

The rest of the show was quite good, too. The Revue has been presenting occasional themed tribute shows at the Basie since 2005, and has already proved that it can play all kinds of music. But with the theme being a state, rather than a specific artist or style of music, it was really forced to stretch out, and it got the sound and spirit right on everything from sugary pop (Sonny and Cher's "I Got You Babe") to poetic acoustic-rock (Crosby, Stills & Nash's "Helplessly Hoping") and blistering hard-rock (the Doors' "Roadhouse Blues").

Bandiera, who handled most of the lead-guitar work, added chiming 12-string riffs to "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "Turn! Turn! Turn!" (both

performed in the style of the Byrds) and played with a Carlos Santana-like tone on "Black Magic Woman" and "Oye Como Va."

Backing vocalists Layonne Holmes, Maureen McCrink and Lisa Bouchelle made the most of their occasional opportunities to sing lead. Belting out "Piece of My Heart" with Janis Joplin-like power, Holmes brought the show to one of its many peaks.

Southside Johnny guested, singing lead on "Back Door Man" (the blues classic, famously covered by the Doors) and playing harmonica and percussion and singing backing vocals on several other numbers. Another guest, Joe Lepis, donned ghoulish makeup and camped it up on a cover of the novelty song, "Monster Mash." The late Bobby "Boris" Pickett, who recorded the hit 1962 version of this song, was indeed a Californian, but one suspects that if this show had not taken place the night before Halloween, the song would not have made the setlist.



NOAH K. MURRAY/THE STAR-LEDGER

Maureen McCrink performs with The Jersey Shore Rock-N-Soul Revue led by singer guitarist Bobby Bandiera at the Count Basie Theatre.

Other bands whose songs were covered included the Eagles ("Life in the Fast Lane," "Take It Easy"),

Credence Clearwater Revival ("Green River," "Up Around the Bend"), the Mamas and the Papas ("California Dreamin'," "Monday, Monday") and the Doobie Brothers ("Listen to the Music").

The most obscure song? Probably Sonny and Cher's "Baby Don't Go" (sung by Holmes). The biggest omission? Probably the Grateful Dead.

Bandiera announced that the next two Revue shows will take place at the Basie on Feb. 28 (a tribute to bands with brothers, like the Bee Gees, AC/DC and the Allman Brothers Band) and April 23 (a reprise of the Roy Orbison tribute that kicked off the series in 2005). He also said that this year's edition of the Hope Concert, an all-star charity event, will take place Dec. 22.

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