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Springsteen, Southside and Bon Jovi rock Bandiera's fundraiser

BY RICHARD SKELLY, CORRESPONDENT

Kudos to Brick-based singer/songwriter/guitarist Bobby Bandiera. Working with executives at the Count Basie Theatre, along with Terry Magovern, Bruce Springsteen's longtime personal manager, Bandiera put together a very well orchestrated, properly paced concert Tuesday night at the Red Bank venue.

The concert was a fundraiser for the Joan Dancy and People with ALS Support Group. Magovern was engaged to Joan Dancy, a mother of two from Middletown who died from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease.

An early high point of the nearly four-hour show included "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" trumpeter Mark Pender's jam on "Baby I Like It," backed by "Late Night" bassist Michael Merritt, Westfield-based guitarist Glenn Alexander and trombonist/singer Richie "La Bamba" Rosenberg, also part of the "Late Night" band.

Burger, Kavanaugh and Bonds

Bandiera, having just put on a solid tribute to producer Phil Spector, used many of the same singers as he did for that concert, held Nov. 17 at the Count Basie. Bob Burger delivered a convincing version of "Let It Be," accompanied by Kevin Kavanaugh on keyboards, while Gary U.S. Bonds and percussionist/singer Kenny "Popeye" Pentifallo sang a perfect version of "Pretty Little Angel Eyes."

Bandiera played some exquisite guitar on his original, "Love Keeps Messing with My Mind," and on Neil Young's "Like a Hurricane." Bonds and his band took the stage and Joey Stann delivered soul-filled saxophone treatments on Bonds' hit "Quarter to Three."

Singer/harmonica player Southside Johnny Lyon stirred the audience members from their seats for his rock anthems "Talk to Me" and "I Don't Want to Go Home." On the latter tune, he was joined by Jon Bon Jovi, who told the audience, "We're raising some money for a really good cause, but without Bobby Bandiera, none of this would have been possible." Bon Jovi delivered a heartfelt rendering of "Please Come Home for Christmas" and told the crowd, "These are the guys I grew up listening to, Southside Johnny and Bruce, and at the end of the day, I've always been sort of proud to be from Jersey."

Using Bandiera's backing band, Bon Jovi then led the crowd in a singalong on his recent hit, "Who Says You Can't Go Home?" House lights came on throughout that song to illuminate the audience, which sang along with the 44-year-old Sayreville native.

Finally, as if on cue from incessant calls of "Bruuuuce" from the audience, Springsteen swaggered over to the guitar waiting for him onstage. He sang with abandon on "Darlington County," "Spirit in the Night," "Waitin' on a Sunny Day" and "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out."

For a finale, Springsteen led the band through a rousing version of "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," joined by Bon Jovi, Bonds and Southside Johnny.