

Los Angeles Times

POP MUSIC REVIEW; From standards to a duet in Mandarin; Patti Austin and Chinua Achebe prove an engaging double bill.

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Patti Austin singing in Mandarin? Now there's something you don't hear every day. But that's versatile pop-jazz vocalist was doing on Saturday at Cal State L.A.'s Luckman Center for the

Austin appeared with Chinese chanteuse Frances Yip in a program billed as "Papillon III," a concert event held last year in San Francisco to benefit the Jade Ribbon Campaign in its effort to educate the Pacific Islander community about hepatitis B.

In her individual set, Austin offered a brief overview of highlights from her long, productive career, moving easily from the smooth R&B of her chart-topping version of "Come to Me" and a sensual rendition of "Look of Love," she climaxed with a gleeful, scat-singing romp through "Mr. Paganini" from her most recently nominated album "For Ella."

Yip has been described as the Asian Barbra Streisand, and the similarities, in terms of range, vocal range, and manner, were easy to see and hear. An elegant, charismatic presence, she offered spoken remarks in both English and Mandarin. Her songs were equally multicultural, mixing familiar American standards with numerous hits she has sung for Chinese television series, including her signature number, "Si

It was not until the concert's final segment, however, that the promised offering of Mandarin music by Austin finally took place.

Standing side by side with Yip, their two supple voices blending harmoniously, Austin delivered her songs with the same sort of consummate musicality that has characterized her work for more than three

Credit: Special to The Times

REVIEWS & PREVIEWS

JAZZ

► PATTI AUSTIN

For *Ella*

PRODUCERS: Gregg Field, Patrick Williams, Wolfgang Hirschmann
Playboy Jazz/Concord 7503

Such Austin pop/R&B gems as "Baby Come to Me" may find their way onto smooth jazz radio, but at her core, Austin has often exhibited the heart of a jazz singer—and that's what's on display here. Recorded in Germany alongside the WDR Big Band, Austin not only takes on the formidable task of performing songs associated with Ella Fitzgerald, but she also went through the arduous process of re-creating the late singer's complex vocal improvisations on renditions of "Mr. Paganini" and "How High the Moon." The result is electric, as Austin soars through material that she has yearned to sing for years. True, you could pick up Fitzgerald's original recordings and hear these songs done by the master, but in this case, the apprentice turns in as convincing and dynamic a performance as one could hope for.—**SG**