



Southern Charm

AT&T Performing Arts Center | Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House

by Amy Martin

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Dallas — Jeanne Robertson has a soft spot for Dallas. Five years ago, the now-71-year-old humorist was convinced to branch out into social media by posting one of her stories, “Don’t Send a Man to the Grocery Store,” on YouTube. It went viral, which worried the grandmother a bit until she learned what that meant.

What to do with a video that has now surpassed seven million views? You broaden out from the corporate world where Robertson was a fantastically successful convention speaker career and go into comedy show business. Her very first engagement was at the Lakewood Theater. She never looked back.

“Now THIS is an upgrade,” said Al McCree, Robertson’s opening act and tour promoter, his outstretched arm sweeping across at the Winspear Opera House at AT&T Performing Arts Center. The packed house was surprisingly mixed, with a hearty round of under-50 folks attracted from her shows on SiriusXM’s Blue Collar Comedy channel. McCree sang and strummed a little ditty about butter beans and other Southernisms like collard greens and cornbread, turning it into a sing-along.

Then came the tragicomic spectacle of moving the nearly immobile 6’2” Robertson on stage while she comically castigated McCree for referring to it a “bum knee.” She tore her meniscus two weeks prior and endured painful knee surgery. McCree and a stagehand carefully lowered her into a rocking chair (that was later given away). The audience pretty much melted in admiration for her fortitude.

Robertson settled in—“I may be in a chair, but I am still in charge. Remember, I used to teach”—and recapped her career that started as being named Miss North Carolina in 1963 and Miss Congeniality in the Miss America competition. Referring to her stupendous height—“People yell out ‘Hey lady, who do you play for?’ when I walk through airports”—she related how coping with such comments honed her sense of humor early on: “The best place to look for humor is ourselves.”

The audience eagerly took in an hour’s worth of stories unfurling from Robertson. Many spun around the theme of rivalries between Southern universities of Auburn, Elon and Duke, and how the senior set alumni still keep it going. Bear Bryant’s ghost and its houndstooth hat made an appearance. Woven throughout almost all of the tales were mentions of her husband “Left Brain,” a very old-fashioned guy and the comical bane of her creative existence: “Left-brained people are all about order. Us right-brained people hear ‘order’ and think food.”

Robertson’s often-mischievous tales were surprisingly long, rife with digressions, commentary, and one-liners. Like a river bearing to the sea, the meanders gained momentum until swiftly coursing to a punchline conclusion that was often belly-laughing good. Like going to great lengths to connect Left Brain to an old classmate, Bob Sharp, who he denied knowing. This vexed Robertson to no end until he revealed that he did know a Bobby Sharp. It slayed the audience; you had to be there. What made it work was the clear affection for her overly exacting husband.

Unable to perform the usual stage bows and exit, Robertson announced “This is the part where you applaud” and the audience obliged. Then the audience filed out while Robertson’s aides extracted her from the chair and gingerly moved her off stage, animatedly recalling lines from what they just listened to, always the sign of a good show.