

Couple transport fans to Brazil

By Bob Young

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The lure for many in the audience at Luba Mason's show Thursday night at the Regattabar was the hope that her husband, salsa giant Ruben Blades, would join her onstage.

Blades did, albeit briefly.

"I've got to remember how to do this," joked the singer, Harvard Law School grad and politician, who recently stepped down as Panama's minister of tourism. "I haven't shared a room with a musician in - I don't know how long. But I'm not complaining," Blades added.



Nor was the crowd, which discovered that Broadway and TV veteran Mason had more than enough vocal juice and stage charisma to keep things interesting.

Except for the Latin rendition of "Happy Birthday" the band played for Blades, who turned 61 Thursday, this wasn't a salsa event. The inspiration came from farther south - Brazil - and it provided the perfect introduction to New York native Mason, a relative newcomer to the concert circuit.

You're more likely to know blond-haired Mason from TV, where she has appeared on "Law & Order" and "NYPD Blue," or in one of eight Broadway shows, including "Chicago," where she appeared opposite Brooke Shields. Mason and Blades met as cast members in Paul Simon's musical "The Capeman."

At the Regattabar, any over-the-top Broadway tendencies were toned down as Mason dug into material, mostly her own, from her new CD, "Krazy Love." Credit for exquisite

accompaniment goes to her band - pianist Dario Eskenazi of Paquito D’Rivera’s band, bassist Jimmy Haslip of the Yellowjackets and Brazilian musicians guitarist Sandro Albert and drummer Marco Da Costa.

Mason showed she’s more than capable of belting it out, which she did on an appropriately sassy version of “Love for Sale.” But more often than not she was in a romantic, sentimental mood, with her sultry voice the perfect vehicle for a cover of “Skylark” and a gorgeous Spanish-language rendition of “The Look of Love.”

But the Brazilian songs were Mason’s most sensual, and her understated duets with Blades highlighted that strength best. Blades’ slightly rough-hewn Portuguese vocals on “E Com Esse Que Eu Vou” underscored Mason’s feathery singing in English, and that magic was reprised by the pair with even more sugar on Antonio Carlos Jobim’s classic “Corcovado (Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars).”

Sweet nights - and stars - indeed.

LUBA MASON, with RUBEN BLADES

At the Regattabar, Cambridge, Thursday night.

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