



## CRUISING

**Gerard Murphy** of Bon Voyage Cruises & Travel looks at Holland America's newest ship and their entertainment line up



**L**ate last year we had the opportunity to cruise with Holland America locally on the *Noordam*. It was an opportunity to experience not only the traditional cruising style, service and cuisine this 145 year old line is famous for, but also some of the innovations and changes in entertainment and food service that are part of their fleetwide modernisation programme.

Many cruise lines have added dream beds, celebrity chef restaurants, mixologists and the like to their line-up to create points of difference. Holland America have all of those and in fact were one of the first lines to have an alternative fine dining restaurant with their deservedly renowned Pinnacle Grill.

In recent years they have added more dining choices with restaurants by Master chef and food artist Rudi Sodamin. He has designed *Tamarind*, an Asian fusion experience and the star of the show *Rudi's Sel de Mer*, where the plates look so good it is almost a crime to take knife and fork to them, but we did and it was simply outstanding.

But where I think Holland America has leapfrogged the opposition is in music and entertainment. Yes, they have the traditional big theatre shows modernised with the latest technology for musicals, cabaret and comedy. You can also enjoy BBC Earth with live orchestral sound track.

If food is your thing, a partnership with America's Test Kitchen can have you witness

their twice daily cooking demonstrations and that lounge is packed for every performance. You will come home armed with recipes and knowledge to knock up a 20 minute pasta, prosciutto and peas dish!

The jewel in the crown though has to be Music Walk. Quite simply I believe this concept is a master stroke. You can find your groove at BB King's Blues Club, enjoy a classical performance at Lincoln Centre Stage, sing along at Billboard Onboard and now on their newest ships rock the night away at the Rolling Stone Rock Room. These music venues are side by side to form a fabulous aural entertainment precinct.

Holland America has partnered with these famous institutions to design and manage on board music experiences that get you up close and personal not only with the music but also the performers. The venues are intimate and the musicians are simply world class.

The musicians are selected and have performed at their home venues long before they step foot on the ship. The BB King's crew

were from across the USA with two from Memphis itself and were outstanding. They had the funk and the soulful sound. Performing twice each evening, early for the listeners and later for those who wanted to groove on the dance floor from my observation.

The highlight for me was Lincoln Centre Stage. This is a partnership with the famous New York venue, showcasing a small ensemble of outstanding musicians performing multiple programmes of chamber music in the evening as well as afternoon recitals on sea days. Even if you have not been a classical fan before, in this small venue format it will capture your soul – it is pure unadulterated crystal-clear music to the ears.

We found ourselves returning time after time to catch up on composers we hadn't even heard of and lighter hearted performances of movie themes. After a few days you get to know the performers and their

stories. Quite simply this is music up close and personal.

On Holland America's newest ship *Nieuw Statendam* the Music Walk precinct has been expanded, adding a rock'n'roll venue, the Rock Room, in partnership with Rolling Stone magazine along with Billboard Onboard, an interactive experience exploring the charts, news and innovation in music.

Those are just two additions on Holland America's latest ship which will have her inaugural season in Europe this year, starting in the north with Baltic, Scandinavia and Britain, before sailing around the Iberian Peninsula into the Med. On the face of it, maybe BB King's Memphis sound may seem out of place in Europe, but imagine cruising out of St Petersburg and heading to a Lincoln Centre Stage to hear them play a tribute to Tchaikovsky, one of this city's favourite sons!

Photos: Gerard Murphy



# Do You Like Your Music Up Close?