

September 17, 2015

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## Café Carlyle @ 60: Brian Stokes Mitchell Opens New Season



Photo: Michael Willoite

A consummate showman, the Broadway star, Brian Stokes Mitchell took the stage at Café Carlyle this week as if he were born to perform at the iconic supper club. His debut show there, "Plays With Music," might be a pun on plays, as in dramas (think *Man of La Mancha*), or plays as in how he accompanies himself on instruments from simple pipes to one that has piano keys called the melodica. Accomplished as he is on these, his instrument, his voice, is perfection itself. Backed by a first rate band, Mark McClean on drums, Gary Haase on bass, and Tedd Firth's piano, he began his set with "There's No Business Like Show Business," and made this Irving Berlin standard sound like you've never heard it before.

Asking us to hear love songs in a new way seemed to be his strategy throughout a fine set: riffing on romance, his "By Myself" segueing to "I Won't Send Roses," took on the role of beginning a new chapter. After singing "If Ever I Would Leave You," he introduced his next number as a song he'd performed in *Broadway Backwards*, when he would sing an unlikely song: "The Man I Love." But now singing the Gershwin's tune takes on new meaning, he said, because "people can marry who they want." Mitchell then went into a marriage sequence, playing with the various voices of Sondheim's "Getting Married Today," followed by Hammerstein's "Hello Young Lovers," a tribute to his

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father who died last year at age 94, and who had two successful marriages. What is the secret to staying married, he joked. Three words: Don't get divorced. Mitchell then kissed his wife of 21 years, seated stage side.

His final encore, "What a Wonderful World," set the tone for his two-week run, assuring everyone that the Café Carlyle in its 60th year is off to a great season.

*A version of this post also appears on [Gossip Central](#).*