

October 22, 2014

ENTERTAINMENT

Buster Poindexter makes the Café Carlyle 'Hot Hot Hot'

By Frank Scheck

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Forget the stiff (\$50 to \$130) cover charge and sharp-dressed clientele: For now, the elegant Café Carlyle is New York's funkier dive bar.

All thanks to Buster Poindexter, lounge-lizard alter ego of David Johansen. He's had at least three incarnations in his decades-long musical career, starting with punk's New York Dolls, but Johansen never really hit it big until he reinvented himself as Buster Poindexter in the late '80s, topping the charts with his infectious cover of the calypso song "Hot Hot Hot."

Buster/Johansen is now 64, still a slim, dashing figure with a gravity-defying brown pompadour tinged with gray. As much a raconteur as a singer, he cracks corny jokes and even does a Carol Channing impression. Backing him up is a first-rate, four-piece band whose members, he says, made "great pot-smoking companions."

In fact, it may be the first time the swanky Carlyle's heard a song singing pot's praises, in the Fats Waller hit "If You're a Viper." It's just one of many oddball numbers in a show that mixes R&B, soul, country, pop, jazz, rumba, blues, rock — even a touch of English music hall.

Buster's deep, gravelly voice is perfectly suited to material like the Coasters' "Down in Mexico" and Harry Roy's "South American Joe." And his ironic persona infuses songs like "I Believe in You" from "How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" with hilarious subtext.

"I'm so happy to hear you applaud because it gives me a moment of respite from my obsession with death," Buster said the other night. But that's belied by the joy he shows in performing.

"It's a craze, and I'm gonna hip you to it," he declared before launching into a slinky dance routine. And, true to his word, for 90 minutes the room was the hippest place in town.



Buster Poindexter takes the stage at Café Carlyle.

Photo: Michael Wilhoite



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Buster Poindexter is playing at Café Carlyle, 35 E. 76th St.; 212-744-1600. Through Saturday.