

October 23, 2014

## REVIEWS

### **Buster Poindexter at Café Carlyle**

David Johansen's lounge-lizard persona sits down for a residency at New York's classiest cabaret joint.

By [Zachary Stewart](#) • Oct 23, 2014 • [New York City](#)



Buster Poindexter and his band perform a weeklong engagement at Café Carlyle.  
(© Michael Wilhoite)

In an age dripping with metatheater and irony, have we come to the point where a good cabaret show must necessarily be a parody of itself? Sporting thick-rimmed glasses, a wide-open collar, and a pompadour teased to the rafters, [Buster Poindexter](#) certainly looks like a caricature of a lounge singer. Yet his show at [Café Carlyle](#) is one of the most satisfying musical acts you're likely to encounter in New York this autumn. Parody or not, this show is hot.

Poindexter is, of course, the crooning alter ego of New York Dolls front man David Johansen. As Poindexter, the punk rocker became internationally famous in the late 1980s for his cover of the calypso exotica number "Hot Hot Hot," which has enjoyed a healthy life in commercials and bad comedy films ever since. Fear not, that song makes an appearance, but it is far from the evening's most memorable or exciting number.

Featuring a set list that encompasses blues, rumba, rock and roll, and English music hall, Poindexter is the living embodiment of eclectic. He enters snapping and singing "If You're a Viper," an improbably old jazz ditty (first recorded in 1936) about the joys of marijuana. He pays tribute to his hometown with Gordon Jenkins' rollicking "New York's My Home," giving special emphasis to the lyric "It hasn't got the opera in The Met."

[http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/buster-poindexter-at-caf-carlyle-\\_70375.html?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_name=23oct2014](http://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/buster-poindexter-at-caf-carlyle-_70375.html?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_name=23oct2014)

October 23, 2014

This sly nod to the controversy around *The Death of Klinghoffer* is one of the show's many moments that feels simultaneously classic and modern. The song has been around since the 1940s, but its inclusion in this evening feels ripped-from-the-headlines topical.

Poindexter and his band are particularly good at drawing on music from disparate sources and putting them into a show for this specific time and place. You also feel like you're learning something about the history of American music: Poindexter pulls out his harmonica for a showstopping version of "Rocket 88" (possibly the first rock-and-roll song ever to be recorded). The obscure 1930s faux-rumba number "South American Joe" is also a lot of fun. He swings an inspired version of Frank Loesser's "I Believe in You" from *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* before explaining, "We wanted to do one you actually knew."

Poindexter is in excellent voice, with a resonant and clear sound. He belts out song after song with the backing of Brian Koonin on guitar, Richard Hammond on bass, Ray Grappone on drums, and Clifford Carter on piano. All are extremely talented and get the opportunity to show off in numerous solos over the course of the night.

Throughout, Poindexter remains the quintessential band leader and star. He holds the audience in thrall with his wit and charm. His between-song banter and absurd anecdotes (including a few patently ridiculous ones about his best friend, Carol Channing) are pure cabaret. He turns around to watch his band play an interlude while taking a big swig of a cocktail resting on the piano. "Yeah man," he shouts as they improvise. You wonder: Is the swagger of punk rock that different from cabaret? This heady mix of fabricated stories, obscure songs, and excellent musicianship makes it feel as though we've entered the Carlyle through the looking glass. After seeing this show, however, you may not want to come back to the normal world.