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Megan Hilty puts together a warm and witty cabaret show at Cafe Carlyle

'Smash' TV star and Broadway headliner shows impressive range and style with band including husband Brian Gallagher

BY JOE DZIEMIANOWICZ



Megan Hilty and husband Brian Gallagher at Cafe Carlyle

There's something about a baby bump that makes the jazzy standard "The Best Is Yet to Come" even riper with meaning.

That point hits you when Megan Hilty — a bombshell from "Smash" and an expectant mom — performs this juicy, jaundice-free song at the Cafe Carlyle. Hilty's two-week residency marks her debut at the Upper East Side nightspot. But except for a few moments when she pushes too hard in an intimate setting, she's in her element.

Acting is about becoming someone else. Key to a winning cabaret show is being yourself. And Hilty gets that. Accompanied by four terrific musicians, she's natural and open,

warm and big-hearted. She gushes about "the man of my dreams" — husband, baby daddy and guitarist Brian Gallagher. The two harmonize on a bouncy medley of "Almost Like Being in Love" and "This Can't Be Love."

Hilty's set list draws heavily from pop classics, including "Someone to Watch Over Me," "Get Happy" and "The Man That Got Away." She also focuses on songs she originated and covered on "Smash" — including "They Just Keep Moving the Line," about the no-win nature of show-biz, and "Second Hand Baby Grand," about Marilyn Monroe's beloved piano.

Between numbers, Hilty quips about the sagging viewership of the defunct "Smash" and acknowledges that some of her Monroe research came from watching the Mariah Carey episode of MTV's "Cribs." "The more you talk," teases Gallagher, "the less we belong here."

A veteran of the musicals "Wicked," "9 to 5" and "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," Hilty packs a big husky belt. Her vocal horsepower is on frequent display during the 80-minute set. But she's actually at her most impressive during the show's quieter moments. One highlight is a duet of "You Don't Know Me" with pianist Matt Cusson, whose voice is as easygoing and inviting as a just-plumped pillow.

For sweetness' sake, Hilty's take on the Kermit the Frog ditty "Rainbow Connection" shines very bright. She asked an audience member to tape her performance with her iPhone — a gift for her unborn daughter. Hand on her belly, she says, "We're all here tonight."

Through June 7. Cafe Carlyle, 33 E. 76th St. \$50 and up. Reservations at (212) 744-1600.