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# Hilty's nearly a 'Smash' hit in cabaret debut

By Frank Scheck



Megan Hilty made her New York cabaret debut belting out “They Just Keep Moving the Line” as if she were still auditioning for the role of Marilyn Monroe on “Smash.” At 33, she has the fierce energy of an ingénue determined to make it into the big leagues.

But Hilty already has, proving herself in Broadway’s “Wicked” and “9 to 5: The Musical.” More recently, she made a terrific Lorelei Lee in Encores! production of “Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.”

**Megan Hilty performs at the Café Carlyle.**

Photo: Michael Wilhoite

Performing at the Café Carlyle Tuesday in a skintight dress that showcased her baby bump, she made the evening a family affair. Her four-piece band included her husband, guitarist Brian Gallagher, and she prefaced an encore of “The Rainbow Connection” with a touching greeting to her unborn daughter.

A powerful singer — she barely seemed to need a microphone on such numbers as “Get Happy” and “That’s Life” — she sometimes sacrificed an emotional connection to the material, and “The Man That Got Away” came across more triumphant than anguished.

Still, she hit it just right in a medley of “Autumn Leaves/When October Goes” that she delivered with a hushed delicacy, which fully captured the songs’ poignancy.

She also did well by “Second Hand White Baby aGrand” from “Smash,” jokingly telling her audience, “You were the ones who were watching . . . I’m proud of you.”

Hilty’s warm and engaging personality makes it impossible to dislike her, but like many performers new to cabaret, she hasn’t quite mastered the art of crafting a cohesive evening. That should come with practice. Meanwhile, there are worse ways to spend a night than basking in the enveloping power of her formidable voice.

*Megan Hilty at the Café Carlyle; 35 E. 76th St.; 212-744-1600. Through June 7.*