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WeekendARTS

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With Lorelei behind her, Megan Hilty returns to the Café Carlyle. BY STEPHEN HOLDEN

Jazzy Swing Pop, Easy on Innuendo

Behind the brass is a silk-and-lace lining. That was the happy discovery at Tuesday's opening-night of Megan Hilty's return engagement at Café Carlyle. Ms.

STEPHEN HOLDEN

MUSIC REVIEW

Hilty will long be remembered for her portrayal of Lorelei Lee three years ago in the Encores! concert production of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," for which Ben Brantley of The New York Times credited her with "wresting Lorelei from the hands" of Marilyn Monroe and Carol Channing.

Megan Hilty is at Café Carlyle through May 30, 35 East 76th Street, Manhattan; 212-744-1600, thecarlyle.com.

But on Tuesday, it was her slow, delicate rendition of a classic cabaret song, "The Ballad of the Sad Young Men," arranged for voice and piano, that revealed a sweetness and empathy that have little to do with Lorelei's crass materialist philosophy. Ms. Hilty delivered this meditation on lonely barflies "drinking up in the night, trying not to drown," with lyrics by Fran Landesman and music by Tommy Wolf, in the plaintive voice of a sympathetic onlooker aghast at her friends' slow-motion self-destruction.

The number showcased the fleet pianism of her musical director, Matt Cusson, who led an ensemble that included Brian Gallagher (Ms. Hilty's husband) on guitar, Ryan Hoagland on per-



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Megan Hilty, whose show at Café Carlyle included the classic "The Ballad of the Sad Young Men."

cussion, and Dennis Keefe on bass. The arrangements varied in style from pop-jazz to light swing.

Most of the rest of the program was a frisky upbeat affair that

Nods to 'Smash' and Cole Porter.

blended standards with songs from the TV show "Smash," in which she played Ivy Lynn. Numbers like Cole Porter's "Let's Misbehave," which others load with innuendo, were de-erotized and became summonses to innocent mischief issued by a grown-up Disney princess.

Several songs indirectly celebrated the birth of Ms. Hilty's first child, Viola Philomena, in September. The quiet joy of new motherhood flooded "A Place Called Home," from a television adaptation of "A Christmas Carol." Ms. Hilty imbued this musical greeting card as well as Irving Berlin's "Count Your Blessings" with such ingenuous sincerity, it felt as though she had lent you her rose-colored glasses.