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Weekend Arts I

An Evening of Dylan, Sung Clear and Free of Sentiment

“Well, it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord/But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”

Those lines from the Bob Dylan song “Gotta Serve Somebody”

STEPHEN HOLDEN

MUSIC REVIEW

rang loud and raw on Tuesday evening at Café Carlyle, where Joan Osborne opened a two-week engagement devoted to Mr. Dylan’s work. Like Bonnie Raitt, a musician to whom she has often been compared, Ms. Osborne is a fiercely intelligent, no-nonsense singer-songwriter who is allergic to traditional pop sentimentality, though hardly devoid of feeling.

As both a songwriter and inter-

preter, she looks life squarely in the face. Any self-pity has to be earned and is inseparable from a tinge of self-disgust. She treats Mr. Dylan as a fellow troubadour and roustabout, inventing the rules while traveling along an endless road.

Mr. Dylan’s songs are so deeply ingrained in the culture that it’s a wonder that more singers haven’t devoted entire concerts to his songs. There are still many buried gems in his catalog. And

Joan Osborne continues through March 18 at Café Carlyle, 35 East 76th Street; 212-764-1600, rosewoodhotels.com.

because Ms. Osborne’s rock-blues voice is steadier than Mr. Dylan’s eccentric shape-shifting delivery, her show clarified his lyrics and brought out the strength of his blunt tunes without sweetening emotions that come out unedited.

Ms. Osborne, accompanied by Keith Cotton on keyboards and Jack Petruzzelli on guitar (both sang backup vocals), performed a selective anthology of Mr. Dylan’s work that covered every period except his early folk years. “Gotta Serve Somebody” was the closest thing to a didactic statement. Ms. Osborne said her favorite decades of Mr. Dylan’s writing were the 1980s and ’90s. She brought a special intensity to

“Love Sick” from his 1997 album, “Time Out of Mind,” turning its key phrase, “I’m sick of love but I’m in the thick of it,” into a loop of fear and loathing.

Her rendition of the mysterious, surreal, “Dark Eyes,” from the 1985 album “Empire Burlesque” was equally strong, and Ms. Osborne made sense of that ubiquitous anthem, “Forever Young,” which often sounds like a mockery of baby-boomer narcissism. Sung by a woman and taken very slowly, it became a lullaby sung by a parent to a child. At every point in the evening, you had a sense of Ms. Osborne as an artist who knew exactly what she was doing.



MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Joan Osborne Ms. Osborne at Café Carlyle, where on Tuesday she opened a two-week engagement devoted to Bob Dylan’s work.