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THE Arts

Recalling Yesterdays, With an Eye on Tomorrow

The moon was full on Tuesday evening at Café Carlyle, and I don't mean literally. I'm describing the voice of Judy Collins at the opening night performance of her engagement at the club. The cool, sweet caress of her vibratoless soprano has always evoked various lunar phases. Always lovely, it can be a delicate wisp or a graceful crescent. But on Tuesday, it was full-bodied, confident and pitch-perfect.

STEPHEN HOLDEN

MUSIC REVIEW

The gain in strength may have something to do with the fact that Ms. Collins has been working on a Stephen Sondheim project for television, and those songs require more preparation than most.

Ms. Collins, who enjoyed the first hit version of "Send in the Clowns," was present at many historic moments in pop history. She recalled listening from behind a door as Bob Dylan composed "Mr. Tambourine Man." Leonard Cohen urged her to write her first song, "Since You've Asked," after she recorded "Suzanne." Stephen Stills wrote "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes" for Ms. Collins. The 13-year-old Arlo Guthrie opened for her in her New York folk-club debut.

While reminiscing, Ms. Collins was never grandiose or boastful. She provided just enough inside gossip to remind you that these

events took place before the musicians became living legends, and her stories were imparted with a twinkling sense of humor.

Backed on keyboards by her musical director, Russell Walden, who supplied quiet vocal harmonies, Ms. Collins accompanied herself on guitar for much of the evening and later took over the piano to sing a major new original song titled "Arizona" whose rippling texture gave her room to expand the composition as she saw fit. Filled with images of na-

Songs and stories of a life in showbiz.

ture, the song belongs to the same semiclassical mode as her late composition "The Blizzard."

Mr. Sondheim's songs are so filled with psychological drama, and Ms. Collins's temperament is so quietly reflective, I wondered how these two divergent musical personalities would converge. She met the challenge head-on and delivered one of the most robust performances I've heard her give in years. One high point was an inspired merger of "No One Is Alone" and "Being Alive." Her "Send in the Clowns," the best rendition I've heard her give, was fortified by long, steady phrases that trailed into the ether and the calm, farsighted stance of a woman looking forward and back without regret.

Judy Collins is at Café Carlyle through May 16, 35 East 76th Street, Manhattan; 212-744-1600, thecarlyle.com.



MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Judy Collins The singer and songwriter performing at Café Carlyle.