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Decisive, Not Demure, in Her Way With a Songbook

Who knew that the Brat Pack girl of the '80s was weaned on the records of Bessie Smith and Fats Waller? That's what Molly Ringwald told the audience

STEPHEN HOLDEN

MUSIC REVIEW

at Café Carlyle on Wednesday evening in her introduction to a saucy, tough rendition of the 1929 song "Mean to Me" by Fred E. Ahlert and Roy Turk. Delivered as a combative retort, it conveyed the attitude of a woman confidently standing her ground in a domestic conflict.

Ms. Ringwald, now 46 and married (for 14 years) with three children, is all grown up. The spin she brings to the American Songbook is thoroughly contemporary. The heady romantic fantasies that infused the pop singing of earlier decades are not for her. Her breezy take on "I Thought About You" was addressed not to a lover but to her children.

Molly Ringwald performs through Oct. 18 at Café Carlyle, 35 East 76th Street, Manhattan; 212-744-1600, thecarlyle.com.

A show that's breezy, brisk and dramatic.

The Brat Pack era coincided with the ascent of Madonna, and Ms. Ringwald conveyed a less defiant mix of the same brashness and zaniness that Madonna breathed into pop. The show opened with her version of "Sooner or Later," from the movie "Dick Tracy."

Ms. Ringwald, who has a reasonably strong voice and blunt style of syncopation, displayed a reliable sense of pitch but showed little interest in sounding demure or coy. She maintained an easy rapport with her musicians: the excellent pianist Peter Smith, the bassist Trevor Ware and the drummer Tony Jefferson.

Many of the songs were refreshed by brisk tempos. "I Feel Pretty," arranged in double time, skipped along frantically. Spitting out the lyrics to "Brother,



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Molly Ringwald *The actress features a defiant tone in her singing at her Café Carlyle show.*

Can You Spare a Dime?," Ms. Ringwald addressed the present economic malaise in a sarcastic tone.

Her solid acting skills lent her dramatic performance of the Billie Holiday standard "Don't Explain" a core of emotional truth. Where Holiday's version was the muted cry of masochistic compliance by the partner of a cheating spouse, Ms. Ringwald expressed a clear-eyed decisiveness, as though she had agreed to forgive his betrayal, but only this once.