

Culture Molly Ringwald

Molly Ringwald's jazz show at the Carlyle is the ultimate nostalgia trip

Pretty in Pink star and newly minted Guardian columnist embarks on New York residency running through 18 October

by Kayla Epstein



Jazz "is the thing I did before I did anything else," Molly Ringwald told the crowd at the Carlyle during An Evening with Molly Ringwald. Photograph: Michael Wilhoite

"I'm gonna get you good and liquored up!" Molly Ringwald promised the audience on the first night of her residency at the Cafe Carlyle, the legendary Manhattan cabaret club.

Ringwald, all self-awareness and sass, needed to find a way to promote her album without seeming like, you know, a *celebrity*. So every time she flashed her 2013 jazz record [Except Sometimes](#) during the set, she made the audience take a drink – and gently accosted with encouragement those who weren't playing along. The diners ate it up.

"You look *MAHVELOUS*, *dahling*," shouted one man ensconced in a shadowy corner with two women dressed like they were attending a burlesque show in space.

And indeed she did: Ringwald bore little resemblance to the eternal teen of John Hughes' films; her signature red hair was cropped into a sophisticated bob, and she traded her pink prom dress for a slinky, sparkling number.

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The actress, whom the emcee introduced as “Concord recording artist Molly Ringwald,” is no jazz neophyte. “This is the thing I did before I did anything else,” she told the audience mid-set. Raised by her father on a musical diet of Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith and Ella Fitzgerald, Ringwald released an album in 2013 titled *Except Sometimes*, featuring classics from the Great American Songbook.

Ringwald’s voice wasn’t infallible, but she put those acting chops to good use on heartbreakers like Billie Holiday’s *Don’t Explain*. Her set list also included showtunes like *On the Street Where You Live* from *My Fair Lady* (“The Stalker Song”, she called it) and a kicky version Stephen Sondheim’s disowned *I Feel Pretty* from *West Side Story*, along with unexpected classics like *I’ll Take Romance* and *Thought About You*.



Ringwald covers showtunes such as “*On the Street Where You Live*” from *My Fair Lady*. Photograph: Michael Wilhoite

She didn’t take the old and make it new again – that’s not what the Carlyle is all about. One of the last bastions of Old New York glamour, the cafe’s air is thick with nostalgia; it radiates from the little white-fringed lamps illuminating each table and the white-jacketed waiters who recite the drinks menu, dominated by classics like the *Manhattan* and the *Sidecar*, by heart. Woody Allen, the ultimate vanguard of the good ol’ days, famously plays jazz there on Monday nights.

But what Ringwald did do was make us see her in an entirely new light. Though Ringwald is a bona-fide multi-hyphenate – mother, singer, actress, novelist and Guardian columnist – her place in pop culture is so bound up with the John Hughes heyday that it’s hard to imagine her as anything other than a perpetual teen. She’s clearly aware of the power of that image, and the goodwill that nostalgia can engender for her; hell, she closed her set with a cover of Simple Minds’ *Don’t You Forget About Me*. But she managed to give Carlyle patrons the nostalgia trip that they wanted – and paid a lot of money for – while also showing them a side of herself that they weren’t expecting.

And that’s ultimately why spending *An Evening With Molly Ringwald* can be so revelatory: it makes you realize that she’s been utterly unexpected all along.