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Weekend Arts I



MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

My Generation John Pizzarelli and Jessica Molaskey perform songs from the likes of Paul McCartney in their show at Café Carlyle.

Hits From a Certain Era, Tenderly Played and Felt

It was nearly 30 years ago that Paul Simon's album "Graceland" introduced "The Boy in the Bubble," a prescient song about our perilous, technologized world of "lasers in the jungle" and "the bomb in the baby carriage" with a fragmented expression of apocalyptic dread that still feels remarkably contemporary. And to hear Jessica Molaskey perform it on Tuesday evening with her husband, John Pizzarelli, on guitar at Café Carlyle was to be brought up short by the song's telegraphic sense of alarm. Just like that bomb, the images explode in your mind.

"The Boy in the Bubble" belonged to a suite of songs in the couple's brilliant new show, "My Generation," in which the two musicians turned away from the cool jazz standards that have defined their style to embrace the present, or what used to be the present, and reflect on the passage of years. Like all of their shows, "My Generation" is deeply felt. You have a strong sense that they are baring their personal struggles and resetting their compasses as they go forward.

That song by Mr. Simon was preceded by another of his masterpieces, "The Late Great Johnny Ace," whose lyrics conjure the untimely deaths of musicians, from Mr. Ace in 1954 to John Lennon in 1980. It was followed by Billy Joel's "Summer,

"My Generation" continues through Nov. 28 at Café Carlyle, 35 East 76th Street, Manhattan; 212-744-1600, thecarlyle.com.

Highland Falls," a hardheaded song about a contentious couple taking stock of a thorny relationship in which neither partner will give way. Next came "Oscar Night," a tribute to Mr. Pizzarelli's blazingly gifted longtime pianist, Ray Kennedy, who died in May.

"My Generation" has its tender moments, some of them connected to Paul McCartney, whose post-Beatles songwriting career Mr. Pizzarelli celebrates on his recent album, "Midnight McCartney." "Warm and Beautiful" and "Silly Love Songs," sung very quietly by Mr. Pizzarelli, were reassuring islands of calm in a program whose other songs about relationships evoke doubt and confusion.

The elegiac tone of the show didn't prevent Mr. Pizzarelli and his band (Kevin Kanner on drums, his younger brother Martin Pizzarelli on bass and Konrad Paszkudzki on piano) from occasionally cutting loose to romp playfully through a field of improvisatory delight.

"Twelve Steps to Heaven," an adaptation of a Miles Davis song with lyrics by Ms. Molaskey that lament the dominance of the social media, complemented "The Boy in the Bubble" in its gloomy, if witty, assessment of computer dating.

But the most piercing moment was Ms. Molaskey's rendition of Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now," in which the accumulation of frilly images and singsong verses, divested of prettiness, added up to nothing beyond a realization that "it's life's illusions I recall/I really don't know life at all," sung with a very bitter tang.

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REVIEW