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## Rita Wilson Performs in New York With David Geffen, Mike Nichols, Barry Diller In Attendance: Concert Review

4:35 PM PDT 9/25/2014 by Frank Scheck



Michael Wilhoite for Cafe Carlyle

### The Bottom Line

*The veteran actress proves that her burgeoning singer-songwriter career is no mere ego trip*

### Venue

*Cafe Carlyle  
New York  
(Wednesday, Sept. 24)*

It seems like a daunting prospect to begin a career as a singer-songwriter at the age of 57. But then again, **Rita Wilson** has something of an advantage. A screen and television actress with extensive credits, she's also produced such film hits as *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and *Mamma Mia!* And, let's face it, being married to **Tom Hanks** doesn't hurt. Hence, her two-week run at New York City's venerable Café Carlyle, the former home, as she reminded us, of such legendary performers as **Bobby Short**, **Eartha Kitt** and **Elaine Stritch**.

Fortunately for audiences paying the stiff cover charge, she proved herself no mere moonlighter. Performing a mix of cover songs culled from her 2012 debut release, *AM/FM*, and original numbers from her second album due next year, she delivered a winning set before an opening night crowd that included such heavy-hitters as **David Geffen**, **Mike Nichols**, **Barry Diller**, **Gayle King**, **Christiane Amanpour** and her cheering hubby.

Clearly jazzed about her making her Carlyle debut, Wilson displayed an infectious exuberance that went a long way towards compensating for any technical deficiencies. Her voice is neither powerful nor particularly agile, but it's pleasantly husky and serves well her original material, which leans heavily on the pop-rock style of the 1960s and 1970s.

The new songs, co-written with a variety of collaborators, are direct and personal lyrically, ranging from emotive ballads like "Forgiving Me, Forgiving You" to joyously up-tempo numbers including "Strong Tonight," "Along for the Ride" and "Girls' Night In." "Still Gone" was a moving tribute to her deceased loved ones, while "Joni" paid eloquent tribute to one of her self-professed musical heroes, **Joni Mitchell**.

Played by a tight four-piece band including her musical director/guitarist **Andrew Doolittle**, the original material was delivered in engaging pop-rock arrangements that matched such well-chosen covers as "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow," "Please Come to Boston" and the Supremes' "Come See About Me."

Belying her lengthy acting career, Wilson's onstage patter seemed a bit stiff and overly scripted at times, but her warmth and enthusiasm shone through nonetheless, particularly with an anecdote about having worked (indirectly) with Carlyle mainstay Short on his ubiquitous '70s television commercial for Revlon's perfume "Charlie," whose jingle she exuberantly sang.

Talking about her newfound affinity for risk-taking, Wilson effusively thanked the audience for "being a part of a new beginning for me." It will be interesting to see how far she takes it.