

THE Arts

She's Got That Vintage Peaceful Easy Feeling

Some say it is never too late to be what you might have been. And if you're a performer with the drive and resources of Rita

STEPHEN HOLDEN Wilson, whose new show opened at Café Carlyle on Tuesday night, that hope is not just a fantasy but a real possibility. Many of us live, at least

MUSIC REVIEW some of the time, in the musical dream world of our teenage years. And for Ms. Wilson, that place is the Southern California lotus land of the '60s and '70s distilled in songs heard on a car radio.

Beginning with her first album, "AM/FM," released in 2012, Ms. Wilson defied conventional music-business wisdom by releasing a likable record of vintage pop hits from those golden laid-back days. At 59, an age when most pop performers are well past their prime, she has gone a step further and recorded a second album, "Rita Wilson," of mostly well-made original songs written in the same style, to be released March 11.

As a stage performer, Ms. Wilson is gregarious and forthright: a natural entertainer. Her original songs, most of them collaborations that she sang on Tuesday with a sturdy band (Steve Fekete on guitar and backup vocals, Lee Nadel on

Rita Wilson continues through March 5 at Café Carlyle, 35 East 76th Street, Manhattan; 212-744-1600, thecafe Carlyle.com.



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Rita Wilson, at Café Carlyle, distilling the essence of musicians like Linda Ronstadt and the Eagles.

bass, Rob Mounsey on keyboards and Rich Mercurio on drums) don't beat around the bush in addressing the same relationship issues that inspired hits by Linda Ronstadt, the Eagles and Joni Mitchell back in the day.

Ms. Wilson has a catch in her voice that conveys yearning and potential heartbreak behind a facade of cheer. Her voice isn't gorgeous like Ms. Ronstadt's, but that catch lends her singing a

Inhabiting a musical dream world of her teenage years.

gently compelling tug. She suggests a softer Sheryl Crow or Rosanne Cash, whose song "Seven Year Ache" is a particularly strong echo.

Like the radio hits they evoke, Ms. Wilson's lyrics don't reach for Freudian depths, but they address life's issues in practical language and in tunes that have strong melodic hooks.

She can also be very funny. Her version of the Weeknd song "Can't Feel My Face" was accompanied by a zany monologue about Botox, which she said she had tried only once and didn't like.