

CABARET JOY
By Beverly Creasey

The face of cabaret has changed. It used to be shrouded in mystery—in out-of-the-way, smoke filled cafes where performers crooned until the wee hours and patrons drank their scotch and sodas in the dark. Now that the smoke has disappeared, more often than not, the booze has, too. Venues like the “cabaret connection” at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education (In Harvard Square) offer a “theatrical” evening of cabaret. The shows may have a theme; some have a script, and often there’s little difference between “cabaret” and a “theater” evening like Elaine Stritch’s one-woman, Tony award winning performance in which she held forth (and told a few tales out of school) and sang her signature songs.

Pamela Enders’ sparkling evening of torch songs last weekend combined her favorite music with touching memories, in a theatrical cabaret offering. Sweet stories of courtship were punctuated with witty remembrances and hilarious lyrics like the come-on from *Sweet Charity*, “Hey, Big Spender” (with one-man band Joe Della Penna on both keyboard and foot-pounding “organic” percussion) and Andy Razaf’s cheeky “Handy Man”—with Enders channeling Peggy Lee and Mae West to regale us with what he can do for her front lawn.

Enders is such an elegant performer, with a sophisticated, soft, honey sound, that you’re taken aback—and thoroughly amused—when she lets her hair down in a slightly naughty song like the Kander & Ebb teaser, “Arthur in the Afternoon” from *And the World Goes Round*. You would expect her French, and her Parisian vibrato, to be impeccable in Edith Piaf’s “La Vie en Rose”—and it is!

Enders can break your heart with a love song to her late Labrador retriever and she gets way down, out of her normal range, for the funeral lament from *Porgy and Bess*. She puts a feminist spin on the Johnny Mercer standard, “Goody, Goody” and delivers a delicious parody, called “Hot Flash,” of the Martha Reeves and the Vandellas’ top-40 hit, “Heat Wave.”

She opens the show with a classic Morton Gould/ Dorothy Fields number, “There Must Be Somethin’ Better Than Love” and now we know. The only thing better than love is Enders singing about it.

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