

The New York Times

“Right Tune, Right Singer: Pure Alchemy”

Christine Andreas at New York City’s 54 Below

From The New York Times

By Stephen Holden

January 29, 2013

“Bemused,” the title of the singer Christine Andreas’s deliciously tangy show at 54 Below, is one of the most misused and hard-to-pin-down words in the English language. As Ms. Andreas reflected on its meanings at Sunday evening’s opening-night performance, one synonym, “thunderstruck,” stood out.

For her, she said, it evokes the explosive chemistry when a singer or composer and the right song collide. That would describe Judy Garland and “Get Happy!”; Ethel Waters and “Happiness Is a Thing Called Joe”; Astrud Gilberto and any song composed by Antonio Carlos Jobim; Richard Harris and the songs of Jimmy Webb; and “those very bad boys” Frank Sinatra (with, in her words, his “Jack Daniel’s-soaked heart”) and Jimmy Van Heusen.

The show’s least-known magical connection was Vivienne Segal and two Rodgers and Hart songs, “To Keep My Love Alive,” from the 1943 revival of “A Connecticut Yankee,” and “Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered,” from “Pal Joey.” “To Keep My Love Alive,” the confessions of a serial murderer as to how she dispatched several flawed husbands, Ms. Andreas delivered with a mischievous glee. Her extremely sexy version of “Bewitched” revolved around the words “I’m a rich, ready, ripe juicy plum again.”

Ms. Andreas might be described as a recovering ingénue. The days are long gone when she starred on Broadway in revivals of “My Fair Lady” and “Oklahoma!,” but her beauty and radiance remain undimmed. Her bright, shiny soprano, with its wheeling vibrato and metallic edge, conveys a high-strung emotionality that is sharpened by her acting skills.

Her musicians, the pianist Don Rebic and the bassist Dick Sarpola, maintained a low profile in refined pop-jazz arrangements that encouraged Ms. Andreas to fly as far and wide as she wished. As the evening progressed, her phrasing became increasingly emphatic and at moments almost feisty.

Of all the connections Ms. Andreas made, the most exciting, if unlikely, was with Edith Piaf in a Parisian section that began with “I Love Paris,” declaimed as an anthem. There was nothing demure about her full-bodied renditions of “Milord” and “La Vie en Rose.” She might as well have been standing at the barricades.