

CABARETSCENES

Marcus Dagan

Short Stories: Songs with a Twist

Laurie Beechman Theatre
New York, NY



December issue of *Cabaret Scenes*). His book, *Songs and Their Stories*, is part songbook, part memoir, and it characterizes Dagan's approach to his music as a vehicle for storytelling.

Dagan accompanied himself on the piano, also using an electronic drum box for added rhythm, as he presented a series of medleys, some of them including his own songs, most of them by others. In his arrangements, he makes familiar songs seem new (for example, "Look to the Rainbow" from *Finian's Rainbow*, or Noel Coward's "Sail Away"). One way he achieves novelty within the familiar is to employ original and unexpected phrasing—unusual but never seeming contrived. Another way is by subtle and equally unexpected shifts in rhythm. As a singer, Dagan is in the tradition of such songsters as Barry Manilow and Neil Diamond (he does a Neil Diamond show on cruise ships). His voice is extremely versatile: it can be smooth and strong, or slightly husky and earthy. His delivery is dramatic, sometimes theatrical, and he commands the unwavering attention of his audience.

What was perhaps most striking about Dagan's show is that he can be thought of as a master of medleys. His combinations, like his phrasing, are often unusual, such as the joining of "Try to Remember" with "Heart of My Heart"; or "Broken Bicycles" by Tom Waits with "My Funny Valentine." His medleys, unlike those found in most cabaret shows, are not just the joining of songs with similar themes, but rather interwoven tapestries of music and lyrics created by his thoughtful conceptions, unique arrangements, and his piano playing. For example, before Dagan actually sang "Heart of My Heart" along with "Try to Remember," he played a few bars of the former's melody on the keyboard, introducing what was to come. Two of these medleys were simply fabulous. One of them put together Ervin Drake's "It Was a Very Good Year" with Janice Ian's "This Train Still Runs," combining the potential mournfulness of Autumn with exuberant optimism. Those who might not be able to experience this medley sung live can fortunately hear it on Dagan's CD. His finale was a combination of three songs: Jacques Brel's "Ne me quitte pas" (which he sang like a seasoned performer of French chansons); "That's No Way to Say Goodbye" by Leonard Cohen; and "The Last Thing on My Mind" by Tom Paxton. The three worked together to create an extraordinary musical experience.

There was only one jarring note in the show. Dagan has a pleasant, casual personality, and a keen wit that allows him to use irony and jokes as his patter between songs. Two of these jokes, however, while evoking laughs, belonged more to Borscht-belt type entertainment circuits or comedy rooms than to a show of this

high musical quality. When he performs *Short Stories: Songs with a Twist* again, he should leave them out.

Dagan directed his own show. John Keitel did a masterful job on lights and sound.

Barbara Leavy
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