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Music Review | Lorraine Feather

Satirical Songs of Noncommitted Lovers and Nonhuman Voices

By STEPHEN HOLDEN—Published: February 8, 2008

Automated voices that fail to reassure as you wait impatiently to be connected to customer-service representatives; the hyperbolic argot of sportscasters; graying male movie stars romantically teamed with babes less than half their age: all these and more are twitted in the amusing, fast-paced lyrics of Lorraine Feather.

Ms. Feather, who is singing through Saturday at the Oak Room at the Algonquin Hotel, is the daughter of the jazz journalist and musician Leonard Feather (who died in 1994) and has an acute knowledge of jazz history. What lends her zany observations a historical dimension is that many of her lyrics are settings of tunes by Fats Waller and Duke Ellington. These songs are cheerful tugs of war between the past (the idiom of buoyant stride piano) and the present (relationships with commitment issues).

Other originals she performed on Wednesday were collaborations with contemporaries who include Shelly Berg, her fluent, hyperkinetic pianist (Jay Leonhart plays bass during this engagement), Russell Ferrante, Eddie Arkin, and Bill Elliott.

In her cleverest lyrics Ms. Feather's patter, sung with a conversational ease, suggests Dave Frishberg in double time mixed with the antic playfulness of Jon Hendricks. Until you've heard Ms. Feather deliver her funny sports commentary, "Hit the Ground Runnin'," with a tune by Mr. Ferrante (of the Yellowjackets) you may not have realized how terms like "nail-biter" and "saddled with injuries" constitute a clichéd language unto itself.

The light satire often veers into the personal. The narrator of "Antarctica," a portrait of boredom on a remote outpost frets about having driven away her boyfriend:

*Crustaceous lichens are
Not on my mind quite as often
Ooh, you thought me frosty, but
I was beginning to soften.*

The pacifying automated phone voice in "We Appreciate Your Patience" becomes a surreal stand-in for uncommitted men, announcing:

*I'm not another
Coldly uncaring Lothario
Like the rest of your boyfriends.
I appreciate your patience.*

Of course there's no flesh-and-blood person at the other end.

Lorraine Feather appears through Saturday at the Oak Room, Algonquin Hotel, 59 West 44th Street, Manhattan, (212) 419-9331, algonquinhotel.com.