



ARTS

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A delightful feline with feeling

CABARET

Meow Meow
Beck's Music Box
Review: Pip Christmass

When publicists refer to cabaret chanteuse Meow Meow as an "international singing sensation", they're not joking.

Alternately delighting, frightening and perplexing her balmy Tuesday night Music Box audience, Meow Meow spends more time singing in French, Spanish, German and Russian — hell, she can even do Chinese — than in good old-fashioned English.

Not that this matters because the way Meow Meow sings her torch songs, Shanghai show tunes, Kurt Weill wrist-sliters and 60s French pop is almost more important than the actual words she's singing.

Meow Meow was utterly different to what I was expecting.

Firstly, there's as much comedy in her repertoire as there is cabaret. I knew about her tendency for hilarious audience interaction but she spent almost as much time off stage — prowling a cowering audience for unsuspecting victims to toy with — as she did on stage.

And rather than projecting the usual slick, seductive, sophisticated cabaret persona, Meow Meow is something of a dishevelled diva.

Her frizzy black coiffure looks like it's been plugged into an electric socket; the glittery eye shadow is laid on just a little too thick.

She delights in swilling from the audiences'



Meow Meow: Good vocalist and performer.

selection of beverages — followed, on occasion, by an unapologetic burp — and her spangly dresses, bustiers, bras and frequently flashed knickers don't fit quite right.

If you put Edith Piaf, Lene Lovich and Sally Bowles into a washing machine, and threw in speed instead of washing powder, you might end up with something a little like Meow Meow.

As she tears through her break-up songs

and Weimar Republic doom tunes, she quite often starts singing only to stop and request a drink, or lighting that's just a bit more flattering.

Or she'll break out into a demented cackle, jump into the audience and start crowd-surfing. Or pull a member from the crowd — usually male — to translate from French into English, have a bash at the piano (otherwise ably played by her accompanist, the talented Iain Grandage), or give her a good fondle while she sings.

Rather than feeling annoyed by the disjointed, frenetically stop-start nature of her performance, the audience seemed to be getting into the spirit of things, warming up considerably as the show went on and Meow Meow really began working the crowd.

Ultimately, however, I would have liked to hear more singing than I did because underneath the comedy schtick and admittedly funny flourishes, Meow Meow is a good vocalist.

She can do low and breathy, guttural and growling, or dramatic and operatic equally well.

Every now and then I thought, "Wow, she's great but I wish she'd stop racing around, stand still and just sing."

But then I get the impression that Meow Meow is a woman determined to do the opposite of what everyone expects.

She walks down her own very distinctive Boulevard of Broken Dreams — or, more accurately, she lurches down it in a pair of glittering silver stilettos, bottle of cheap red clamped in her satin-gloved hands.