



## Shana Farr sings the songbook of Barbara Cook – The Pheasantry - Star rating: Five Stars ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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***It's Not Where You Start: Shana Farr sings the songbook of Barbara Cook*** at The Pheasantry, London.



London cabaret buffs have been spoiled for choice with two genuine American divas in town at the same time, elegant Shana Farr at The Pheasantry following the more ebullient Melissa Errico at Live at Zédel. Farr gives us the songs of Broadway royalty Barbara Cook, one of the great Sondheim interpreters, although none of her Broadway triumphs, ***Carousel*** in 1954 and 1957 (when she played both Carrie Pipperidge and Julie Jordan), ***Plain and Fancy*** (1955), ***The Music Man*** (1957) or ***The King And I*** (1960), were by him.

It was through the famed 1985 made-for-TV concert version of ***Follies*** in which she sang the role of Sally, that Cook's mastery of Sondheim, most notably with 'Losing My Mind', was enduringly sealed.

Ten years earlier her coloratura soprano adorned Carnegie Hall in a legendary solo concert, and when she came to London towards the end of her career she filled the Donmar, the Albery, the Lyric and the Royal Albert Hall with adoring fans.

Like Cook, who died last year shortly before her 90th birthday, the Missouri-born, classically-trained Farr has a gorgeous soprano and a big range, as she demonstrates in the comic 'Glitter and Be Gay' from ***Candide***, one Broadway show Cook starred in that wasn't a success.

In 70 short minutes that go by in a flash, Farr races through 22 numbers associated with Cook and still finds time to chronicle faithfully her up-and-down off-stage career while not shirking from mentioning her battles with weight, depression and alcohol.

It was Cook's version of the sweetly humorous 'Vanilla Ice Cream' that made ***She Loves Me*** a hit when she starred in it in 1963. Farr does it proud as she does with numbers from ***Show Boat***, ***Carousel***, ***The Music Man***, ***The King And I***, ***Plain and Fancy***, ***The Gay Life***, ***Oklahoma!*** and ***South Pacific***.

The title song for Farr's well-rehearsed and wittily-presented cabaret 'It's Not Where You Start' comes from ***Seesaw***, a 1973 Broadway flop that Cook wasn't involved with but she recorded the Cy Coleman/Dorothy Fields number 20 years later and included it in many concerts.

It follows a mesmerising five-song Sondheim segment and if there's a more moving version of 'Send in the Clowns' I have not heard it.

'Anyone Can Whistle', 'Everybody Says Don't', 'Losing My Mind' and the lovely 'Not A Day Goes By' aren't too shabby either and Shana would make a fine Phyllis if Broadway was ever thinking of reviving **Follies** again.

All were helped by having the magnificent Jon Weber at the piano, and as she is in England, it is appropriate she should close the evening with Noel Coward's 'If Love Were All'.

It is five years since the cool, glamorous Farr last appeared in London when she did the Julie Andrews songbook at the Crazy Coqs, her first and only previous UK visit.

She has an excuse: in between she was producing a son, now three. But it must not be so long next time. She is a joy to listen to.

**Jeremy Chapman**