

Julie Wilson

By Elizabeth Ahlfors



The star is in her element. The audience is in her pocket. Julie Wilson, glamorous at age 82, proves she can still enjoy an affair of enchantment on stage. Performing at the Metropolitan Room, Wilson stepped to the microphone in a black sequined gown, wrapped in an enormous scarlet feather boa and the omnipresent gardenia in her hair. She set the tone for her show with Sondheim and Styne's *Let Me Entertain You*. Three old-time rousers - *Somebody Else Is Taking My Place*, *I Ain't Got Nobody*, and *You're Nobody 'Till Somebody Loves You* - illustrated Wilson's energy and intensity.

It is the torch songs, however, that Julie Wilson inhabits. She digs for the passion, drama and candor in songs like Heyman/Green's *Body and Soul* and Good Morning Heartache by Higginbotham/Drake/Fisher. She bites into lines like "I've got those Monday blues/Straight through Sunday blues." She performed George and Ira Gershwin's *The Man I Love* - that white knight every girl dreamed about - a song originally written for *Lady Be Good*, but dropped. It was subsequently put in two other shows, and again dropped. The song earned its popular success through jazz and cabaret performers who recorded and performed it through the years. Wilson's other lost-cause selection, *Mad About the Boy* (Noel Coward), held an air of fatalism. "If he was real or not I couldn't tell/But like a silly fool, I fell." A leisurely suggestion to her lover to *Remind Me* (Dorothy Fields and Jerome Kern), is a uniquely forthright declaration of a romantic itch that won't be scratched.

Wilson speak-sings most of her songs, using acting skills and theatre experience. Her voice has limits, but she renders new sentiments. Here's to *The Ladies Who Lunch* (Sondheim) is more witty than catty these days. Wilson is more understanding of those ladies now.

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Julie Wilson presents an impassioned but not flawless performance. She flubs lyrics and depends on her musical director/accompanist, Christopher Denny, who supports her with strong chords, interesting spaces, and lyrics on alert. While Let Me Entertain You sets the show's tone, more reflective of Julie Wilson's spirit is her spirited closer, Here's to Life (Butler/Molinary). Her first-night audience gave her a standing ovation. That's not easy in a packed space like the Metropolitan Room.

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