

Cabaret

Linda Purl

The Crazy Coqs, W1

★★★★☆

No one seemed to know quite what to expect from a performer who is better known for playing Elizabeth Gaines in

Homeland and Helene Beesly in the American version of *The Office*. You may also remember Linda Purl as the Fonz's girlfriend in the bright and breezy *Happy Days*, a show that was definitely not be confused with the work of Samuel Beckett.

By the end of Purl's first night, though, one thing was clear: she has to be invited back for another residency. Having had minimal time to get acquainted with her British pianist Barry Green, she gave a mesmerising display, her personality setting the room aglow. Her voice is bright and full-bodied but tinged with a beguiling huskiness and a relaxed, thoroughly jazzy sense of swing. Droll and worldly, she is refreshingly free of nightclub

schmaltz. "Middle-aged broads should not be forced to stand in stiletto heels," she drawled at one point.

Billed as a journey through the golden age of the New York nightclub, the programme was in effect a showcase for her recently released album, *Midnight Caravan*, the set list diligently following the album's running order. Purl kept the narration to a minimum, tossing in winningly self-deprecatory remarks and a curious anecdote about listening to the Dalai Lama in the Midwest.

The songs spoke for her. *Autumn in New York*, prefaced by its verse just for a change, has rarely sounded so wistful; *My Ship* drifted across a pale horizon. On *Them There Eyes* Purl cut loose with phrasing that had all the authority of a seasoned jazz vocalist and she added an elegant touch of chanson with a version of *L'Etang* that was accompanied by an unobtrusive spoken translation. Mischievously, she recruited Green as a singing partner on the effervescent *Oh Me, Oh My*. He survived the experience and so did Ira Gershwin's playful lyrics.

Clive Davis

Box office: 020-7734 4888, to Sat