

Meow Meow: Simply Meow | His Majesty's Theatre | ★★☆☆

Meow Meow brings her luscious, unique, chaotic energy to the stage of His Majesty's Theatre as a part of the Perth International Cabaret Festival in *Simply Meow*. Entering the stage in a glistening black and silver gown with two cigarettes between her fingers, she joins her on stage band with Mark Jones on keys and Ben Witton on the double bass.

After her opening number, equipped with BYO props, Meow Meow marched off stage and into the audience, handing out plastic long stemmed red roses to members of the front rows to throw at her in rapturous applause. Throwing said roses back into the audience and demanding more applause, she also brought a portable smoke machine to pull out when she felt the audience was lacking. At one point, she demanded stagehand Steve come to the front of the stage with a lazy Susan (that he duly spun her around on for an entire song) to make up for the theatre's lack of revolving stage. Her stagecraft is sublime as she brings a hysterical element to the on-stage chaos through physical and vocal comedy.



In an interview with Kerry O'Brien, she states that as far back as she can remember, music has captivated Meow Meow – especially when it's mixed with politics. "There's something about the raw, the kitsch, but without the poignant it just doesn't do it for me. I like music when it's transcendent – that's where spirituality is."

Meow Meow talked us through imagery of the pieces before singing them, their settings, and correlating historical happenings, honouring the historical lineage of the music. You can tell her repertoire selection is deeply driven by this love. The first part of the performance was grounded in Weimar Berlin – taking us back to the 1920s in an underground bar, in a time when composers and performance makers were pushing the boundaries of western art. Music of the Weimar period saw a time of real experimentation – fusing contemporary with classical music resulting in this jarring, unpredictable, experimental style, filled with striking, dissonant chords and unresolved harmonies.

The audience was mesmerised by her rendition of Kurt Weill's *Surabaya Johnny*. Between the chromatic piano accompaniment and the rich, sultry tones of her lower vocal register, Meow had the entire theatre in the palm of her hand. The audience was peppered with middle aged men who felt the need to call out at inopportune moments, however throughout this piece she was in full control. In a moment where she held a

pause for what felt like 30 seconds – you could have heard a pin drop. In that moment, I felt transported to a European speakeasy – the ensemble somehow making His Majesty’s theatre feel like the most intimate of digs.

Her performance ranges from slapstick to breathtakingly vulnerable. Singing in French, German, English and with a little bit of questionable Mandarin thrown in, Meow is a veteran of the stage. The latter half of the performance took a more reflective turn as she performed a beautiful rendition of Patty Griffin’s *Kite Song* as well as works by Meg Washington and a piece she’d written in collaboration with Ian Grandage which was a particular highlight for me.

It’s not easy trying to find the words to best describe Meow Meow’s performance, however I can’t think of a better description than: a tonal collision of genres and singing forms; crossing the globe and singing through the eras. She’s dramatic, theatrical, bold, and brash. She challenges the concept of what is art and pushes the boundaries of Western music’s uniformity.

Between the physical comedy, astute timing, goddess like musicality and her lush, gravelly tone, Simply Meow satisfies the senses in this crowd-pleasing spectacle.

Get a taste of this week’s Perth International Cabaret Festival at tonight’s Closing Night Gala at His Majesty’s Theatre. For more, head to perthcabaret.com.au

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