

Wolf Entertainment Guide

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Johnny Rodger Photo: Bill Westmoreland

JOHNNY RODGERS' 'WONDERFUL WORLD'

CABARET CALLING

William Wolf • Wolf Entertainment Guide

The Oak Room at the Algonquin Hotel, known as a landmark of cabaret sophistication, isn't the kind of place where one is likely to say the joint is jumpin'. But it was sure ju.mpin' on the opening night of the new Johnny Rodgers show, "What a Wonderful World," and one can count on it continuing to jump during his May 11-29, 2010 gig.

Rodgers, with his mischievous smile and his ebullient personality, tears into his piano keyboard with gusto and pours his passion into whatever he chooses to sing. He works with a perfect team of Brian Glassman on bass, Danny Mallon on drums and Joe Ravo on Guitar, and together, they make music with plenty of bounce. Mark Waldrop has directed.

Johnny Rodgers appears through May 29 at the Oak Room of the Algonquin Hotel, 59 West 44th Street, Manhattan, (212) 419-9331, algonquinhotel.com.

Rodgers has achieved distinction as a songwriter, as well as for performing in person and as a recording artist. He led into the show with his own swinging "Take Another Chance on Love," and treated the audience to his own hit, "Home to Mendocino," which he said he composed after being intrigued by seeing the word Mendocino. Other compositions of his that he included were "She," as well as "One More Moment," the lyrics for which he wrote with Lina Koutrakos, and "The Best of You in Me," which he wrote with Richard Barone.

Rodgers mixes styles, doing a spirited "Jailhouse Rock" as well as an American Songbook number he calls his favorite, "Too Marvelous for Words," with music by Richard Whiting and lyrics by Johnny Mercer. Rodgers put his own jaunty imprint on "Any Place I Hang My Hat is Home," by Harold Arlen and Mercer, and he excelled with the classic "Birth of the Blues," music by Ray Henderson and lyrics by Buddy G. DeSylva and Lew Brown.

He can be especially great when he sings a song with which he can have plenty of fun, as evidenced by one of the evening's highlights, "Huggin' and Chalkin'," with music by Clarence Leonard Hayes and lyrics by Kermit Goell. It is a rousing, funny number about a fat woman and a lover's effort to chalk her dimensions, with someone else chalking her from around the other side. Not politically correct these days, referring to the woman as a blimp, but still an affectionate look at a lady the singer adores even while having fun at her expense. The number is a definite audience pleaser and Rodgers made the most of it.

Rogers himself is a born audience pleaser. It is as if the word affability were invented for him. He is a consummate entertainer, who has worked with Liza Minnelli. He noted that he had been chosen to travel abroad in November for a project designed to bring American music to other nations. You don't have to go that far to catch his effervescence and charm—just to the Oak Room in the Algonquin Hotel, 59 West 44th Street. Reservations: 212-419-9331 or bmcgurn@algonquinhotel.com