

Marianne Faithfull, Live Review, City Winery, December 19, 2011
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By Larry Jaffee

Marianne Faithfull's welcome return to New York concert stage reminded one of that funky old aunt in everyone's family. You know, the one who has lived a rich life, albeit one with a colourful past. In her younger days, she was a looker, the traveler who visited other continents, who might have had a brush with fame and glamour, and who made some mistakes she might not be too proud of.

Faithfull's three-night stand last week at the City Winery reinforced her musical legacy of someone far more than Mick Jagger's girlfriend during the Swingin' London era. It was a great contrast to her powerful 1990 comeback show at St. Ann's Church in Brooklyn, captured on CD and video as *Blazing Away*, which I was lucky to witness as an audience member.

Since then, Faithfull has made a string of always interesting albums, collaborating with various hipsters, such as Nick Cave, Jarvis Cocker and The Decemberists, the latest being the recently released *Horses and High Heels*, the title track of which opened the second night set. For me, the set highlight was "The Crane Wife 3" and I loved how she made The Decemberists' staple her own.

There's no denying of Faithfull's ability to survive or tell a story. All right, maybe a few of them went on too long. And the decades of cigarette smoking, hard drinking and drug use have perhaps taken a toll on her voice. But it's always about the phrasing, and for this chanteuse, she's most at home in a cabaret setting. Her four-piece band lovingly supported her every vocal, and the sound didn't get harder rock than "Broken English."

Set-wise for the nearly two-hour show, she stayed mostly in her ballad-heavy comfort zone, such as Duke Ellington's "Solitude" and Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan's "Strange Weather." She tapped the new album for a few songs, but also some of the songs that have been cornerstones of her live act for the past decade, such as "Incarceration of a Flower Child," which she explained was written in 1968 by Roger Waters "but not recorded by the Floyd." Tucked away in a drawer, Waters and Faithfull liberated it. She mentioned that one of her biggest mistakes in the 1960s was admitting to her mother that she did drugs, which resulted her being locked up in a mental hospital. "I had to call Mick to get me out."

She graciously sang "As Tears Go By," realizing that the classic song will be forever tied to her, and that she owed it to the audience.