



# Cabaret Exchange

“Raising the Bar on All Things Cabaret”

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Written by David Rabinovitz



*Secretly Square*, Francesca Amari's showcase of "guilty pleasure songs" was on display at The Metropolitan Room on September 22 [Editor's note: It was reviewed on that date, and performed again on the following Monday. This was a reprise of her debut show, seen earlier this year at the same venue.]

A "guilty pleasure song," as defined by Ms. Amari, is a song that you love against your better judgment. And may better judgment – musical correctness and the canons of sophisticated taste – be damned. Ms. Amari unashamedly reveled in a set of 1950s and '60s AM radio throwbacks that have a deep personal resonance for her.

By delving into her adolescent infatuation with Johnny Mathis, her ideological dust ups with her true-believing rock & roller of an ex-husband, and by performing "Should've Never Let You Go", a Neil Sedaka/ Phil Cody tune, with one her sisters and a niece, both of whom sang beautifully, Ms. Amari demonstrated the seamless interconnections between music and life.

Another characteristic of a "guilty pleasure song" --- and let me not compromise the joy and surprise of the potential listener by giving away too much of the set list --- is a song that after years, even decades, of not hearing it comes back to you in its entirety. You are singing along, word for word and note for note, before you realize it. And you even remember the person whom you were dating at the time. And most importantly, the "guilty pleasure song" packs an emotional wallop that sets off a chain of personal associations that define you as profoundly and as intimately as anything else does.

Ms. Amari, with an abundance of self-reflexive wit, and consummate vocal skill, brought us to the heart of the mystery of how and why music can be such a powerful force in our lives. Her fearless celebration of her alleged squareness stands as a powerful rebuke to the compulsive hipsterism that dominates much talk about music and in so doing robs the music of its communicative emotional essence. Another, and quite better way of saying the above, is, as they used to put it on New York's old radio station WWRL, "if you don't dig this, you got a hole in your soul."

Ms. Amari was exceptionally fortunate to have the masterful Chris Denny as an accompanist and music director. Mr. Denny was unobtrusively sensitive and times playfully suggestive. In conclusion, I'd like to say that if the unreconstructed rock & roll allies of Ms. Amari's ex-husband had been present, they would have surrendered.

**Francesca Amari's show was directed by Barry Kleinbort. Visit [www.myspace.com/cabaretamari](http://www.myspace.com/cabaretamari) to learn more and hear several songs by this vocalist, who is appearing this month in Michigan (dates on that myspace page).**