

Pitre gives powerhouse performance; Star of Mamma Mia! brings big passion to tiny Savoy stage

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When Louise Pitre sings a song, dammit, it stays sung.

The award-winning star of *Mamma Mia!* stepped onto the tiny stage of the Savoy Cabaret last night and gave a knockout 90-minute demonstration of what star power is all about.

Whippet thin, sleekly tanned, her trademark silver hair flashing proudly in the light, she sang number after number in that take-no-prisoners style she's made famous.

She started off accompanying herself at the piano for a few numbers, including a poignant version of the masochist's anthem "Here's That Rainy Day." But soon she was front and centre, while her gifted accompanist, Diane Leah, took over behind her.

That's when Pitre really went for blood. Jimmy Webb's song about John Lennon's death, "Shattered," became a searing exploration of every kind of loss, while Leslie Arden's "It Started Out So Well" held all the promise and pain of a love affair in a single three-minute song.

Pitre the songwriter also showed what unsparing stuff she was made of, with a wrenching number she wrote to her father when he was dying of Alzheimer's, "Please Say My Name Out Loud."

Each song she performs is a three-act play, filled to the brim with passion and emotion, but somehow, magically, never tipping over the edge into bathos or sentimentality. That's the true test of Pitre's artistry a lot of singers know how to go for it; Pitre also knows when to stop.

There were some delicious bursts of comedy as well, including a "British Invasion" medley and that gem from Wonderful Town, "100 Easy Ways to Lose a Man."

But it was the heartbreak that won out every time, especially when she switched into French. Jacques Brel's "Ne Me Quitte Pas" blazed with desperation, Edith Piaf's "Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien" had the tang of true defiance and Pitre's own French lyrics to "The Winner Takes It All" conveyed a wounded nobility that conquered us all.

When it was over, the audience insisted on an encore and she obliged with a rendition of Gilles Vigneault's "Mon Pays" that united both solitudes and proved the perfect Canada Day present.

The only thing wrong with Louise Pitre's appearance at the Savoy Cabaret is that it ends tonight. If she were performing indefinitely, we'd have an attraction that tourists would be coming here to see.