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**HEADLINE:** 2004 Nightlife Awards

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**BODY:**  
(Town Hall; 1,500 capacity; \$ 75.)

Produced by Scott Siegel. Directed by Jamie McGonnigal. Stage manager, Laura Kravets. Reviewed Jan. 12, 2004. Running time: 4 HOURS.

Host: Andrea Marcovicci.

With: Christine Andreas, Betty Buckley, Jim Caruso, Bill Charlap, Lea DeLaria, Darius de Haas, Greg Giraldo, Judy Gold, Allan Harris, Dannah Feinglass, Jackie Hoffman, Alan King, Jenifer Kruskamp, Ute Lemper, Jeanne MacDonald, Maureen McGovern, Sharon McNight, Dimitri Martin, Mark Nadler, Phillip Officer, Eric Reed, Annie Ross, Steve Ross, Paul Sheer, John Selya, Douglas Sills, Billy Stritch, KT Sullivan, **Paula West**, Margaret Whiting Guests: F. Murray Abraham, Robert Altman, David and Helen Gurley Brown, Sandy Duncan, Tovah Feldshuh, Tammy Grimes, Cady Huffman, Stanley Meyer, Julie Wilson.

Comedian Alan King greeted the Town Hall aud by quipping, "I hope you all live as long as this show!" The second annual Nightlife Awards' emcee, Andrea Marcovicci, assured patrons there would be no acceptance speeches. Winners instead would acknowledge the honor with a performance. Good idea, except songs, skits and routines exceeded the limits of a thank-you speech and, as King noted, "The introductions were longer than the acts!"

But with producer Scott Siegel harnessing Gotham's reigning divas, the marathon turned out to be well worth the stiff pricetag. Christine Andreas, who returns to the Cafe Carlyle next month, reprised her spinning "Storybook" from "The Scarlet Pimpernel." Her kittenish charm, a seductive blend of French and English, and that soaring Broadway voice was clearly the evening's early triumph. Maureen McGovern, winner of the vocalist award, did a telling Norma Desmond turn on "I'll Never Say Goodbye" from "Sunset Boulevard," while Betty Buckley, cited as a cabaret legend along with pianist-accompanist Kenny Werner, purred a wistful "Send in the Clowns."

Octogenarian (come July) Margaret Whiting, recipient of the Nightlife Hall of Fame honor, leaned on the grand piano to recall the boozy grandeur of the Harold Arlen-Johnny Mercer latenight lament "One for My Baby." The standing ovation that followed, for a change, was truly deserved. Biographical intro by a gushing Douglas Sills, however, was uncomfortably lengthy, spilling over with sidebar recollections of Ethel Merman and Mary Martin hanging out with Whiting at Ted Hook's theater hangout Backstage.

San Fran jazz baby **Paula West** did her trademark turn on Oscar Brown Jr.'s, "The Snake," and continental chanteuse Ute Lemper, on a night off from her Carlyle gig, offered a classy reprise of some salty Kurt Weill. Golden girl KT Sullivan coupled with Mark Nadler for an Irving Berlin wartime medley that seemed all too timely.

Only Lea DeLaria's quirky take on "Night and Day" brought an unsettling note to the stage. After quoting DeLaria's backstage confessional, "It's the stalker version," Marcovicci, the definitive distaff interpreter of sophisticated Porter legacy, quipped with tongue firmly in cheek, "I wish Cole was present to hear it!"

Resting strained vocal chords, Marcovicci opted not to sing, but kicked up a brief leggy dance turn with "Movin' Out" hooper John Selya.

Annie Ross, cited as a jazz legend, offered a delightfully droll take on the Andrews Sisters' 1940s satire "One Meat Ball." Another item on the menu was cabaret comedy winner Sharon McNight, who delivered a hilarious ode to bacon.

The gents fared well, with Sills boldly stirring "Pimpernel" tune "She Was There" and Philip Officer remembering composer Burton Lane and lyricist Alan Jay Lerner with "Too Late Now" and "What Did I Have That I Don't Have?" Both rendered boldly flavorful Broadway belting.

Steve Ross, introduced by Marcovicci as "the poster boy for sophistication," justified the moniker with Porter's "Easy to Love." He introduced the tune as Jimmy Stewart's greatest hit, and his trivia-wise audience knew the reference: Stewart, not one of the silver screen's better light baritones, introduced the song in 1936 screen musical "Born to Dance."

Comedy spot found King in high spirits with old-age gaffs. Jazz highlights included pianist Eric Reed in a tastefully tailored Monk mood and Bill Charlap warming up a frigid Gotham crowd with "Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most."

Tidy tech control provided sound crisp and clean and lighting sharp and pointed.

Producer Siegel next has on his cabaret sked "Broadway by the Year," which kicks off a series Feb. 9 at Town Hall presenting "The Musicals of 1929." The revue will feature Sutton Foster, Nancy Opel and Mark Kudisch, with tunes from "The Desert Song" and the Gershwins' "Oh, Kay!"

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