

# The New York Times

CABARET REVIEW

## *Like That Other Dame, She's Definitely No Angel*

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By STEPHEN HOLDEN

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When Paula West strikes a sultry pose, rolls her eyes and flashes an impish half-smile, the ghost of another woman named West (Mae), tints her thick velvety voice a delicate shade of blue. This San Francisco singer, who is appearing at the Oak Room of the Algonquin Hotel through Dec. 1, loves lolling around in songs, finding their sexual undercurrents and executing discreet vocal bumps and grinds while joyfully riding them downstream.

Ms. West's new act is generously packed with songs that accentuate this sly voluptuousness. Her version of "You Fascinate Me So" leans into every soft shoulder and dangerous curve of that Cy Coleman and Carolyn Leigh standard. In her hands Oscar Brown Jr.'s "Snake," about a kindhearted woman who saves the life of a reptile that turns around and

bites her, becomes a sexy, hard-boiled urban fable. The high point of her show is a pumping version of Cole Porter's "Can-Can," one of the composer's most thrilling displays of mischievous verbal fireworks. The energy of her show flags only during the ballads when Ms. West seems to be concentrating more on making a polished sound than on interpreting a lyric.

Since making her New York cabaret debut several years ago, Ms. West has moved steadily away from pop toward jazz. And in her new show she proves she's a jazz natural: the more aggressive the rhythm, the harder she swings.

During her five-week engagement, Ms. West will be accompanied by four different ensembles: the Bruce Barth Trio (through Saturday), the Bill Charlap Trio (Nov. 6-17), the Mulgrew Miller Trio (Nov. 20-24) and the Eric Reed Trio (Nov. 27-Dec. 1).