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## Paula West tries a new beat, gets usual excellent results

By Chad Jones  
STAFF WRITER

**C**ABARET singer Paula West — long one of the best things about living in the Bay Area — has been out of her cocoon for some time. But in her new show at San Francisco's Plush Room, West is a whole new butterfly.

Her long tresses have been chopped. Her trademark wrap has disappeared from her shoulders, and her band is now helmed by New York pianist Eric Reed.

Rodney Green, another New Yorker, is on drums, and local hero "The Reckless" Bill Douglass is on bass.

With her new look and her jazzier style, West has moved to the next phase of her career. She exudes musical confidence, and backed by the Reed Trio, her swinging is fast and furious.

This is evident from "Mr. Kicks," the Oscar Brown Jr. tune that kicks off her 70-minute, 13-song set.

West has always had a keen sense of rhythm, but with a drum set now part of her act, she has fun with percussion like never before. On Rodgers and Hart's "Mountain Greenery" she gets downright groovy, and on Duke Ellington and Bob Russell's "Do Nothin' Till You Hear from Me" she and her players kick up dizzying jazz frenzy.

For Bernice Petkere and Joe Young's "Lullaby of the Leaves," West begins with just voice and bass, as if the song really were a lullaby. But then Reed and Green jump in, and the tune swings. Even West's delicate humming has sass.

One thing that makes West's style a cabaret kind of jazz is her attention to the lyrics. She has a playful relationship with the beat, but she delivers lyrics with respect.

This is apparent on three songs loaded with lyrics. Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Waters of March" is full of contrasting images, sweet and sour, joyful and sad. In West's version, you tend to feel the good parts more powerfully than the bad.

Cole Porter, long one of West's favorite songwriters, is the author of the word-heavy West classic "Can-Can." The



**PAULA WEST** appears with a jazz trio at the Plush Room in San Francisco.

### If you go

▶ **Paula West in concert**

★★★★ Red hot

▶ **Where:** The Plush Room in the York Hotel, 960 Sutter St., San Francisco

▶ **When:** 8 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays; 5 p.m. Sundays; plus 7:30 and 10 p.m. Feb. 14 and 15; closes March 16

▶ **Tickets:** \$25 cover plus two-drink minimum

▶ **Call:** (415) 885-6800 or visit [www.plushroom.com](http://www.plushroom.com)

singer has moved on to a new Porter list song, "Let's Do It," a lengthy litany of romantic habits among the lower orders. The song demonstrates that West can swing and be funny.

The apex of the new show begins in a song introduction, with West admitting that she likes some rap and hip-hop and believes the origin of the style goes back to 1957. Next thing you know, she has launched into Meredith Willson's "Ya Got Trouble" from "The Music Man."

Impeccably performed, West doesn't make the show tune swing exactly, but she brings it as close as it will likely ever get to snappy, propulsive jazz.

West and her crack band cap the show with Irving Berlin's "Let's Face the Music and Dance," performed to the rhythm of a runaway train.

Of course the singer does "The Snake" for an encore, but even that classic West tune shines in different ways now. Paula West has always been good, but these days, she is finding exciting new ways to be great.