



**Festival 09**

# Life is a rousing, kitty-cat cabaret

**CABARET**

Camille O'Sullivan  
 Beck's Music Box  
 Review: Stephen Bevis

When it comes to the standards, a performer is either an interpreter or simply a cover act.

Irish cabaret singer Camille O'Sullivan showed on her first Perth visit that she doesn't just cover a song, she inhabits it.

Versatile and unpredictable, she relishes and exploits the rich storytelling of Jacques Brel, Kurt Weill and their contemporary equivalents Nick Cave and Tom Waits in an act honed over the seven years since she gave up architecture for a career under lights.

O'Sullivan, who has an Irish father and French mother, combines the sunny Irish optimism of her between-song patter ("You cheeky monkey," she tells one audience member) with the immersive Gallic melancholy in the Brel songs that

dominated her show.

Her act, though, is best suited to the embracing confines of a smaller room than at the open-air Music Box. She had a harder job than usual in warming up a crowd collectively goose-pimpled by the south-westerly that buffeted the clarity of the sound and diluted the intimacy of her music. However, it did give a fetching wind-machine look for her vampish, long black hair.

Not afraid of long anticipatory pauses between numbers, she swigged from a bottle, donned a hat or slipped on a pair of sparkling red high heels as part of building her characters for many of the songs, which were carried by a voice that was both plaintive and powerful.

Her wasted, drunken incarnation for Brel's Middle Class Pigs was a hoot, as was a raucous rendition of the Tiger Lillies' Crack of Doom, which thundered along on the back of her all-Australian band of Mark Ferguson (piano), Matt Willis

(bass), Ant Gray (guitar), Philip Bywater (sax and clarinet) and drummer Hamish Stewart. At the other end of the scale, Brel's The Song of Old Lovers and Cave's The Mercy Seat and Are You the One That I've Been Waiting For were exquisitely re-interpreted. A thumping, exhilarating rendition of David Bowie's Moonage Daydream was the last surprise of the night before a two-song encore.

O'Sullivan played up the cabaret kitty-cat image all night as she prowled the stage and the aisles to exchange "meows" with the audience. We'd seen it all before, of course, courtesy of Australian tigress Meow Meow at last year's Festival but O'Sullivan's sweeter persona won over the sell-out crowd. "On stage you can do whatever you like," she said by way of a self-knowing excuse. "Whether you are happy to pay for it is another thing."

As the standing ovation showed, they were.



Powerful: Camille O'Sullivan gives full vent to her powerful delivery at Beck's Music Box. Picture: Toni Wilkinson