

Her Latest "Smash": Patricia Barber Returns to Boston for Latest R-bar Show



Jan 30, 2013 at 12:00 AM

Wed. January 30

Inspiration can come from anywhere. This is especially true for artists; people who make a life out of exploring life. Jazz composer/pianist/vocalist/pioneer Patricia Barber epitomizes the exploratory and inspired world of the artist. From Cole Porter to Ovid, she has found inspiration for her diverse realm of expression and has inspired others to go even further. On January 30, Barber will come to Boston for a rare appearance at the Regattabar in Harvard Square. At the show, she will premiere presents from her latest album, "Smash" and delve into her encyclopedic catalog for favorites old and new.

Known as the doyenne of Chicago's famed Green Mill (where she performs nearly every Monday night), Barber has also made her mark internationally, performing in France, South Africa, Turkey, and other points, taking sounds and ideas from all of them to share with all others. No matter what she picks to play, however, Barber brings to it her own Heartland heart and international flair.

Though her performances are far-flung, both in terms of venue and material, Barber's musical roots are homegrown. "My father was a musician," Barber explains, noting that the man who taught her how to play the piano had played part-time with legendary bandleader Glenn Miller. "My mother was a wonderful singer and they both knew and loved Jazz."

With this musical background, Barber pursued music outside the home, putting together a double major in college of classical piano and psychology that hinted at her expansive proclivities. "Psychology informs my music in that I'm fascinated with people and their motivations, their demons, their joys," explains Barber, who also taught music at the University of Illinois campus in her native Chicago. "In my songs, I inhabit fictional characters in a deeper way."

Through such "deeper" inhabitations, Barber is also often able to take songs and stories that many people know to a deeper level. Among the most profound example is her recent reinventions of the Great American Songbook contributions of Cole Porter and her musical setting of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*; the latter of which marked the first project by a songwriter to be supported by a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship.

While she is clearly daring and unfettered by the demands of the music world (while at the same time remaining devoted to the music), Barber has also been described with such words as "complete", "devastating", "smart", and "dazzling" and has been likened to such other songwriting wonders as Joni Mitchell. When asked to describe herself, Barber admits that it may be "difficult" to describe her music and explains that her hope is to "carve out a niche that is all my own."

"It's based in the jazz forms," she suggests, citing Mitchell as a major influence, "but also includes musical elements of contemporary classical music, classical music and pop."

As she has travelled so much, Barber says that her musical repertoire and her style are continually evolving and that, even at her popular Monday-night gigs in Chicago, no two shows are alike. "When you play live every week or every night," she says, "you just absorb music." When asked what she has "absorb"-ed about Boston, Barber replies (very sincerely), "I enjoy playing Boston very much because it is the smartest audience I play for. They always get the jokes, they laugh when I would expect them too and they understand the slightest nuances and double-entendres. It's very satisfying!"

That is why Barber is so happy to be bringing her latest collection, "Smash" (Concord) to the Regattabar in the musically intellectual heart of Harvard Square. As "Smash" consists of all originals, some audiences have had to warm up to it (though this is never difficult, considering Barber's smart and seductive compositional style and brilliant



piano work), but Barber is sure that the Boston crowd will "get it" right away and that she will be able to enjoy the evening as much as they do. "I will always work at music from the time I get up until evening," she says. "It's my favorite thing."

Shows at 7:30 and 10 PM. Tix: \$25.

One Bennett Street, Cambridge (in the Charles Hotel in Harvard Square) 617-395-7757
www.regattabarjazz.com

Close Window