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Interview with Andrea Marcovicci

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Andrea Marcovicci is a Golden Globe nominated actress who has been the worldwide reigning "Queen of Cabaret" for over two decades. Her shows are entertaining, elegant and meticulously researched and crafted: a mixture of music, history, humor and insider stories culled primarily from the Great American Songbook and its lore and legend. She has sold out Carnegie Hall, sung at the White House for President William Jefferson Clinton, and ushered in the Millennium in concert with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

On November 15, she will open for an unprecedented 25th Year at the Algonquin's Oak Room, in a new, semi-autobiographical show titled "No Strings". "The Andrea Marcovicci Suite" at the Algonquin Hotel, dedicated in 2006 on her twentieth anniversary at the Oak Room, contains memorabilia of her work in theatre, film, television, and on the concert stage. The previous honorees at the time were James Thurber, Noel Coward and Dorothy Parker.

I met Andrea at the Empire Diner in 1977, around the time of her Golden Globe nomination for Woody Allen's "The Front." She swept through the door one day, exotically beautiful, wearing a serape skirt and wrap. I was face to face with the young woman I had seen many afternoons on The Mike Douglas Show when she was a teen, singing and playing her guitar, shyly and naively answering Mike's questions about her adventures as an aspiring actress in New York City. When I sat down with her on October 22, 2011 in New York City, we talked about her transformation from shy and quiet, boho Reno Sweeney darling to "the chatty chanteuse" of her Marcovicci at Midnight days in L.A., to the glamorous performer and cabaret historian of today.

BF: You began to sing professionally in New York City at (70's cabaret venue) Reno Sweeney with a repertoire that was eclectic, to say the least: Fred Astaire, Kurt Weill, David Bowie... and your large band included a conga player! You never spoke to the audience, except to say "thank you." In fact, you told me, "You must NEVER speak to the audience."

AM: And I have absolutely *no* idea why I thought that was a good idea! But I *couldn't* talk in those days; I did not have the facility. I came from the more "Germanic" school of cabaret: semi-nasty and haughty.

BF: Really? Weren't you just terrified?

AM: Ha! Yes... and I thought if you just had a certain demeanor, you could hide your fear with a lot of skilled hair-flipping, and a change of profile from right to left.

BF: You were quite a denizen of New York nightlife then.

AM: I was on the cover of *New York Magazine* in 1977 with the title "The Night People." We'd stay up all night, record music, sleep one hour, have an audition, and get the job. In between I'd drop in at any disco, day or night. I don't know how we did it all, but it was the 70's, so undoubtedly there was some sort of substance abuse involved.

BF: I caught up with you again in 1986 after you moved to Los Angeles, at a Marcovicci at Midnight performance at Tom Rolla's Gardenia. Nothing could have prepared me for the Marcovicci I witnessed that night. You spoke to the audience almost as much as you sang....and you were hilariously funny. I felt hoodwinked! What happened?

AM: By then I was working with (director) Henry Jaglom on improvisational acting, and it just wasn't acceptable for me to hide behind an attitude anymore. It was important for me to be able to impart information. Henry gave me a quote from Beckett. He said (paraphrased), "Try again, fail again. Fail better." Those became my watchwords for having the courage to just be myself, to live through the fear and express it either through song or dialogue. And if I was truly nervous, to just say it, because I had nothing to lose. These were midnight shows in Los Angeles, after all! I did a different show *every* Saturday night at The Gardenia for several years. The Gardenia was, and is still, my lab. I learned the Great American Songbook repertoire that I now know so well, the extraordinary breaking of the fourth wall... and I learned to talk! Being quick-witted, seeming off the cuff - that came from getting up week after week and improvising, and writing it down later, and then doing it all over again. You'll never get that spontaneity if you don't get up and do it over and over again.

But there's another important bit to it. There can't be a love/hate relationship with the audience; it has to be a love/love. An unabashed love for strangers *has* to part of who you are. I tell the master classes, if you don't have this, get out of the business.

BF: How did the "historical cabaret artist" emerge?

AM: Doing a new show every week, I built a huge repertoire and then I began to see the prevalent connections. I'd think, "My gosh, there's a lot of Kern here," and it came naturally to do a night of Kern. The movie songs became *Marcovicci Sings Movies and Other Love Songs*. Walter Cronkite said, "Why don't you do a show about World War II?" And I'd always wanted to do a night where you tell one love story from beginning to end, and that became *What is Love?* This notion of being a "historical storyteller" started to happen and themes started rolling out of me. People began calling me with ideas, and gifting me with songs and I just got luckier and luckier. I started to make folios of ideas. I could put an idea on the back burner for the future. It's a never-ending source of wonder, the American Popular Songbook.

BF: The new show is called *No Strings*. I find that quite an interesting title for the mother of a 16 year old.

AM: That struggle has a place in the show, but it's really a fun and lovely show about travel, my 25th Anniversary at the Algonquin, about being homesick when you're away and restless when you're at home; the songs I've collected along the way, the goodbyes I've had to say and the hellos I get to say as well. You know, it's that sense of being a road warrior.

BF: In a war, there are usually some battles lost and some won.

AM: Yes.....well...in terms of the battle...I've had a very bittersweet life. It hasn't been easy to travel for 25 straight years when you have a marriage (to actor/photographer Daniel Reichert) and a baby, and you're saying goodbye more than usual. Danny and I reversed roles, essentially; I was more the wage earner and Danny the full-time caregiver when Alice was born. That's a difficult business, the role reversal. We now live in two homes, so the marriage obviously suffered. We created two homes as quickly as possible so Alice wouldn't be unhappy, and we avoided all unkindness and rancor. Without question, Daniel Reichert is the most remarkable father, Alice is a magnificent girl, and my daughter *loves* me! We will get divorced online or something, and someday I will go on talk shows and tell people how you can do this without ever screaming and yelling and shouting at each other and pulling the baby apart and making a mess of everything.

BF: About a decade ago, your shows took a deeper turn, which I never thought was possible.

AM: Yes, it was a real growth spurt, which you can trace to that horribly difficult time in my life; to go through the breakup of a marriage, to be alone; the determination to save my relationship with my child and the struggle to keep this life happening. I had to power through and be *fierce*, and deal with changes in my voice, and have the courage to write those shows and get up every night and *entertain* people. So, I have used these characters - Cole and Linda Thomas Porter, Fred Astaire, and all the rest - I've used these tales, these fables...these *other* people who were strong, to tell my story. The Fred Astaire show particularly, was a way of working through the breakup. I was telling stories about love gone wrong, and night after night I was getting stronger. In the Frank Loesser show, I told the story of a man who left one life behind, from the point of view

of the woman who watched her husband fall in love with another. I was working through the pain and creating these wonderful story shows.

I'm ready with *No Strings* to tell *my own* story of the last 25 years. And it's by no means sad! It's a great ride, a wonderful reflective show. And the next show, by the way, is called *Smile*. I'm researching why certain songs, happy and sad, bring an immediate smile to the face. The rhythms, melodies, words... There is a responsibility these days to help keep an audience as upbeat as possible, and *No Strings* and next year's *Smile* are both terrific shows for challenging times.

BF: You once said, "I'd love to sing Tracy Chapman's *Fast Car*, but I just don't think it's appropriate for a white woman in a black velvet dress." What's your new *Fast Car*?

AM: Pink's *Glitter in the Air*. I think I *can* sing that song, and I'd really like to, soon.

BF: Can you comment on Rob Kardashian not knowing who Fred Astaire is?

AM: There is no punishment good enough for him!