

## The Boom Boom Club at the Nightjar

Submitted by C.J. Lazaretti on Sun, 30/01/2011 - 21:13

With arts budgets contracting all over Con-Dem Britain, it's a relief and a victory to see well-curated, unapologetically diverse shows like the *Boom Boom Club* expanding. Not content with a [weekly spot at the Bathhouse](#) in Bishopsgate, London's foremost bastion of Weimarian decadence has started a parallel fortnightly residency at the Nightjar, Shoreditch's latest underground vintage haunt.

Fans of the show's traditional incarnation will be happy to know that the helm is once more in the capable hands of **Dusty Limits**. Amplified by the intimacy of its new surroundings, the suave compère's acid wit infiltrates every crevice of the captive audience. But it is the added treat of live piano accompaniment that brings his delivery to new heights. Aided by the excellent **Michael Roulston**, Limits' powerful voice rings with the moving vividness of true cabaret in elegant renditions of everything from *Alabama Song* to Natalie Imbruglia parodies. His repertoire is a gem in itself, matching unusual oldies like Friedrich Hollaender's *I Don't Know Who I Belong To* and Cole Porter's *Miss Otis Regrets* with more modern fare like the Dresden Dolls' *Coin-Operated Boy*, in a seamless display of musical élan.

The debut proceeded uneasily at first, with the audience warming up slowly to **Sarah Louise-Young**'s character musical comedy sketch *La Poule Plombée* from [Cabaret Whore Encore](#). Mind-reading tricks by Mike Coffey, AKA **The London Magician**, offered little in the way of entertainment other than the tension of a Russian-roulette stunt with Styrofoam cups and a desktop paper spike, largely unaided by his wooden delivery. Singer-songwriter **Elliot Mason**, on the other hand, was an instant crowd-pleaser, armed with nothing but an acoustic guitar and the most bizarre compositions you're likely to hear on comedy stages – much like his looks, Mason's lyrics resemble a Wayne Coyne on amphetamines. While his slapstick faces grow weary quite quickly, there will always be room for a comic promising to punch babies in the neck for the love of a woman.

**The undisputed height of the evening was Holly Penfield. The jazz dynamo defies convention as she ploughs through enthusiastic, often harrowing versions of standards like Eartha Kitt's I Want to Be Evil and Ute Lemper's I Am a Vamp – clearly meaning every word of it. “Unpredictable” is the word of order: Penfield jumps from lap to lap, riding crop in hand, stealing a drink from a table only to pour it into a shoe snatched from another. Downing it defiantly, she then proceeds to nibble the toes formerly encased by it.**

**After introducing her fellow performer and nonagenarian father Ray Penfield with an indecently whispered My Heart Belongs to Daddy, she joined him in a lively syncopated duet medley of Young at Heart and House of Bamboo. With a formidable voice and ferocious antics, the San Francisco diva is the Iggy Pop of cabaret, conjuring a show at once frightening and mesmerizing. Whipping and mock-raping a leg-locked, spread-eagled critic onstage may be a cherished fantasy for many performers, but one who actually has the balls to act it out deserves the most sincere kudos (my back still hurts a bit, though).**

The venue itself plays a central role in the feel of the show. The Nightjar's bare brick walls, low ceiling and wood-panelled walls, painted sepia with unobtrusive low-key lighting, have all the loungy, murky atmosphere of a proper jazz den. Despite the unusual architecture, with walls obscuring the stage for roughly a fifth of the venue's limited seated capacity, a climate of intimacy permeates the surroundings, proving most favourable for performers to mingle with (and heap abuse on) the audience at close quarters. It is a testimony to the show's masterful concept that its unmistakable character transfers so easily to a different venue. Its consistent brand of vintage indulgence and shameless, in-your-face swagger makes the *Boom Boom Club* an enthralling staple of London's variety scene. If this expansion is a sign of what puts butts in seats, there might be a golden age of British cabaret just around the corner.

***Boom Boom Club*. Nightjar, London. Every second and last Thursdays of the month, 20:30-22:00. £32.50 (reserved seating with complimentary cocktail and sharing platter), £10 (show only). [www.boomboomclub.co.uk](http://www.boomboomclub.co.uk)**