

## Let's Show Some Respect for Songs from the '70s

### Nicole Henry at Feinstein's

By [STEPHEN HOLDEN](#)    MAY 9, 2012

While watching the singer [Nicole Henry](#) go through her paces at Feinstein's at Loews Regency on Tuesday evening, I had the sense of being in the presence of a pop-soul superwoman whose every gesture and inflection conveyed confidence and mastery.

Her singing is as sleek and shapely as her perfectly chiseled arms. As she tossed her hair, she recalled the younger Carly Simon girding for world conquest.

Her show, "So Good, So Right," is an anthology of 1970s pop and soul, from Joni Mitchell to Aretha Franklin to Bob Marley. Scanning the set list I wondered what she could possibly bring that was new to Ms. Mitchell's "[Big Yellow Taxi](#)," or Bill Withers's "Use Me." But time and again she invested familiar songs with an extra fillip of conviction and made you reconsider the words. Her band (Kevin Hays on piano, Adam Rogers on guitar, Vicente Archer on bass and Clarence Penn on drums) percolated unobtrusively.

The Stealers Wheel hit "Stuck in the Middle with You," whose original version seemed content to clone the sound of the Beatles, became a pointed expression of paranoid discomfort felt by a performer surrounded by sycophants. "Big Yellow Taxi" took on an extra edge of exasperation at the way we blithely take valuable things for granted.

"Use Me" built steadily in intensity, so that its title phrase became a repeated cry of ecstasy during lovemaking. If her "Spirit in the Dark" smoothed out the raw gospel edges of Ms. Franklin's [matchless original](#), it still emanated from deep within and had its own majestic arch.

The show reminded me that the oft-maligned decade Ms. Henry was saluting was the twilight of the well-made song, before MTV turned pop music into a flesh and fashion parade, and technological innovation hardened its sound.

The evening suggested that Ms. Henry, who was a child during the '70s, may have been born in the wrong decade. Based in Miami Beach with frequent performances in New York, she has enjoyed some success, but the fact that she is over 30 and not a niche artist is an obvious career hindrance. How many other worthy talents face the same obstacles?