

A WVIP Commentary
By William O'Shaughnessy
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The Cabaret World on the distaff side is populated mostly by overly theatrical divas and coloratura belters who energetically emote and perform as they overwhelm every intimate, sweet, delicate and sophisticated song by making them resemble a booming bel canto aria.

There are a few exceptions. Most prominent among female cabaret singers who don't fall into this "show-off" category these days is, of course, Diana Krall. While many singers attack sophisticated and sensitive lyrics, Krall brings a gentle, easy, intimate and respectful approach to her work.

I've got nothing against an authentic theatrical belter. I loved Ethel Merman. But I flee from the nasal, one-note wail of Streisand's delivery. Tierney Sutton, a west coast singer, is another performer, like Krall, who knows how to caress a lyric and resists the temptation to propel it into the higher rafters. And Sylvia Syms and Blossom Dearie were perfect examples of what we admire. Also Susannah McCorkle.

And don't forget when they asked Louis Armstrong who was the best girl singer of all time, Satchmo replied: "Uh ... you mean besides Ella ...?"

Speaking of which, the glorious Rosemary Clooney. When I asked her one day about Sinatra's insistence of "finishing a word" and not ducking the sibilant "S" (Polkadotsss and Moonbeamsss) ... Rosie Clooney said "William ... how else would you do it?"

Many girl singers of today could also study Billy Holiday who never had to shift into a “Look at me – I’m an ‘entertainer’ – ‘a performer’” mode as she bestowed her uniquely sinuous, supple way on a lyric. My late friend Nat Hentoff once called Lady Day “the best and most honest jazz singer.”

Much could also be learned from those gentlemen who approach the Great American Songbook with a becoming restraint and laid-back respect. The incomparable Sinatra, with his exquisite, sensitive phrasing, serves as the model (and guide).

Melvin Howard Torme and Tony Bennett got it too. Ditto Matt Dennis, Murray Grand, Richard Rodney Bennett, Steve Ross, Eric Comstock, John Pizzarelli, Ronny Whyte, Charley Cochran and a wealthy Connecticut man named Norman Drubner, who has embarked on a second career (he’s produced seven beautifully assembled CD’s!) are examples of singers who know how to “gentle” a lyric. Also Doug Williams, a singer and pianist in Naples, Florida and Cape May, New Jersey in the summer.

And Chet Baker is being discovered all over again for his lush, haunting vocal renditions and deeply-felt romantic ballads to which he brings an intimate, almost intoxicating style in which he barely whispers.

But save us from those earnest female “Bar the door, Nelly” emoters and coloratura divas with their upper register trills.

William O’Shaughnessy, a former president of the New York State Broadcasters Association, was chairman of Public Affairs for the National Association of Broadcasters in Washington. He has been a point man and advocate for the broadcasters of America on First Amendment and

Free Speech issues and is presently chairman of the Guardian Fund of the Broadcasters Foundation of America, the national charitable organization. He is also a longtime director and member of the Executive Committee of the Foundation. He has operated WVOX and WVIP, two of the last independent stations in the New York area, for over 60 years as president and editorial director.

He is the author of "AirWAVES" (1999) ... "It All Comes Back to Me Now" (2001) ... "More Riffs, Rants and Raves" (2004) ... and "VOX POPULI: The O'Shaughnessy Files," released in January, 2011. He has also written "Mario Cuomo: Remembrances of a Remarkable Man," a tribute to his late friend Governor Mario M. Cuomo. His newest book RADIOactive for Fordham University Press, another anthology with interviews, commentaries, speeches and tributes was published in 2019. He is presently working on Townies, a paean to those without wealth, influence or high estate in suburban Westchester County, the heart of the Eastern Establishment.