

## The Literary Review

### *Hot Mike: The Poetry Performance Review* by Lehman Weichselbaum

*Christmas came fifteen days early to Don't Tell Mama. A small act of wonder graced the annual holiday show at the storied midtown cabaret spot. In a rare event of cultural comity, the art of poetry, in the person of Robert Gibbons, was invited to join the microphone with the well-baked scales of popular song. On surface, it was no big deal. Gibbons was brief, and the remaining performers on the bill picked up their tunes without missing a beat. If you blinked you missed it.*

*Nevertheless, in the spirit of the holiday and every day, organizer and host Bronwyn Rucker earns a high mark for a generous and wise recognition of just where arts fuse by dictate of nature, even if everybody doesn't see it that way.*

*John Philip with his amicable tenor, Michael Fairbairn with his ardent tenor, even James Tomkins with his humbug tenor (sporting devil horns in a rendition of "Those Were the Good Old Days" from "Damn Yankees") attested to the unfailing power of annual Yuletide sentiment to transform all and sundry, not excluding New York sophisticates, into kneeling lambs. Rucker stitched it all together, reinventing vaudeville in her belting, shpritzing and comic hoofing as she caromed tirelessly between wings.*

*Somewhere between "Frosty the Snowman" and "I'll be Home for Christmas" Gibbons took the stage and for three minutes or less recited from a notepad a poetic memoir of earlier days among women of Southern American and West Indian descent. Smartly and graciously, he bowed to the genre of the evening by dropping a literally sung chorus between his spoken verses in a downscaled but winning tenor voice. The applause confirmed that the audience enjoyed the surprise. He later sportingly joined fellow performers in a curtain call "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."*

*Gibbon's signature gifts for storytelling, vernacular rhetoric and gestural theater justified his entrance to the roster on the entertainment quotient alone. Obviously, his moment among the songsters in a Manhattan cellar boite won't be igniting any revolutions, but is it fair to call it a herald of a trend in the making or one even, somewhere, already here? In the past, arena rock partnerships brought together bands and bards like Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. More such practical recognition of the structural and historical kinship between verses uttered and sung, directed to the greater enrichment of the human ear, makes perfect sense you say? Run and tell Mama.*