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Youthful Memories, Reinvented

By **STEPHEN HOLDEN**

You can't underestimate the transformation of what seems like an ordinary song when an interpreter like [Sharón Clark](#), a Washington-based [jazz and soul diva](#), tears it apart and peers inside. A prime example in her show "Blame It on My Youth," at the Metropolitan Room on Monday evening, was her ruminative interpretation of the old Carpenters' hit, "Rainy Days and Mondays," supported by Chris Grasso on piano, Tony Jefferson on drums and Neal Miner on bass.

This wistful, breezily-paced car-radio hit from the early 1970s suddenly became a contemplation of chronic depression and the friendship that provides tentative consolation. Even more probing was a version of "Don't Misunderstand," from the 1972 movie, "Shaft's Big Score," whose fatalistic narrator warns a casual lover, "We are only strangers on our way to somewhere else." Had Billie Holiday lived long enough, I would like to imagine she would have seized it.

[Ms. Clark's sound](#), however, evokes not Holiday but rather a less operatic Sarah Vaughan fused with the more animated side of Shirley Horn, a singer who also liked to take her time. Ms. Clark's voice is rich, her phrasing unfussy, her jazz embellishments minimal.

The lighter numbers in this program of songs that [Ms. Clark](#) heard while growing up, included hits for the Beatles ("And I Love Him," "Do You Want to Know a Secret?") and Herman's Hermits (a swinging "I'm Into Something Good"). A current of salty humor infused unlikely selections like "Give a Little Whistle," from "Pinocchio," in which that whistle became a sly sexual invitation, and best of all "Handy Man," in which she took the role of a neighborhood stud using his equipment "24 hours a day" to fix broken hearts.

Sharón Clark performs through Saturday at the Metropolitan Room, 34 West 22nd Street, Manhattan; (212) 206-0440, metropolitanroom.com.