Cultural Daily

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Sandra Bernhard Soothes Post-Election Blues with Nostalgia and Defiance

Steve Gottfried · Sunday, January 5th, 2025

Sandra Bernhard returned for her annual engagement at the Wallis Center for the Performing Arts. What has always been a refreshing snow-globe shakeup of a holiday tradition took on greater import in the wake of the 2024 election results. For this longtime fan, it became a therapeutic pilgrimage to find solace and a path forward amidst what promises to be the four-alarm dumpster fire of Trump 2.0. Looking festive, fit and svelte in a black sequined top and shimmery silver skirt, Bernhard's 90-minute set served up a mercurial mix of personal anecdotes, wry observations and an eclectic arrangement of songs delivered with Bernhard's one-of-a-kind moxie. Backed by her three-man Sandyland squad, the songs seemed to offer an underlying theme of resilience in the face of despair zig-zagging from '70 throwbacks like Christopher Cross's "Ride Like the Wind" and the Pretenders' "Stop Your Sobbing" to contemporary hits like Lana del Rey's "Say Yes to Heaven" and Lizzo's infectious ear-worm "Good as Hell."

Sandra Bernhard. Photo-Credit: Brett Erickson

Sandra's free-flowing format took on a diverse range of pop culture targets, poking fun at familiar faves like Nicole Kidman and Michelle Obama to Shen Yun and Erewhon. She even threw a little good-natured shade at la Streisand, adopting a faux regal accent, sounding off on her 900-plus page memoir before she segued to a few "misty watercolor memories" of her own run-ins with the legend over the years at various soirees and functions. She capped it off with a legit rendition of "People" as she reminisced about a one-time audition for a *Funny Girl* revival that never came to pass. But the biggest applause line came when she described the taunts she'd received from MAGA supporters asking if she's going to leave the U.S. to which she replied defiantly: "No, I'm staying right here to torture your ass."

Sandra ended the show with the 1971 ode to keeping a stiff upper lip "Daydream Believer" with its kitschy refrain "Cheer up, Sleep Jean, oh what can it be, to a Daydream Believer and a homecoming queen…" as if willing us (and herself) to buck up and that somehow, someway we'll make it through the next four years of chaos and corruption. Sandy came back onstage for the obligatory encore and sang Dolly Parton's perennial Christmas staple "Hard Candy Christmas," an apt and bittersweet ode to putting on a happy face through hard times: "I'm barely getting through tomorrow, but still I won't let sorrow bring me way down. I'll be fine and dandy."

Sandra took a moment to thank some famous friends in the audience who'd come to support her including Michelle Lee (of primetime soap *Knots Landing* fame) and comedy icon Lily Tomlin and then exhorted the audience to stop by the merch table on their way out where she would be signing t-shirts etc., but warning overzealous fans to keep it moving with a deadpan rejoinder that only Sandra can pull off: "I'm not your fucking therapist." She wrapped up the show with a weary but heartfelt rallying cry to "Fight the good fight. We're gonna pull through, come hell or high water."

Bernhard will be following up her Los Angeles appearances with a succession of performances December 26th through New Year's Eve at the venerable Joe's Pub in New York.

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