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REVIEWS: NYC LIVE

Chris Caswell

Hold On

At Don't Tell Mama

Musical Direction by James Followell

Review by David Hurst

Chris Caswell is the kind of performer I look forward to watching. He's an accomplished musician with a lovely voice, has an engaging connection with the audience and always performs interesting and challenging songs. The past year has been difficult for all New Yorkers but especially Caswell who lost his younger brother and sister-in-law in a terrible automobile accident. As anyone who has lived through that kind of unexpected and sudden tragedy knows, it has a way of changing your perspective on life forever and Caswell is no exception.

But he has wisely channeled his grief and newfound optimism into *Hold On* and it's a thoughtfully entertaining piece of work.



Ironically, *Hold On* finds Caswell the most relaxed I think I've ever seen him. His voice seems to have gained depth and resonance over the last several years and the rich, warm tenor instrument that is his trademark is in superb form here. It's refreshing to hear Caswell sing arching musical lines with impeccable phrasing and breath control. There's an emotional throb ringing in the top of his range that's as exciting as it is effortless.

Musical director James Followell and guitarist Carl Allocco provide a multi-layered musical background that is energetic and captivating. Followell's arrangements are sumptuous and Allocco's playing and background vocals are every performer's dream. Songs like Rick Jensen's "Coney Island," Tom Anderson's "Two Chairs" and "Has Anyone Ever Written Anything For You" (Stevie Nicks/Keith Olsen) are perfect in Caswell's hands as are two delights from Michael Holland, "Jump For You" and "Trash."

My only suggestions are for him to drop (or at least shorten) the two readings he has in the show. He doesn't really need them and he could easily encapsulate what he wants to say by speaking extemporaneously. He has a winning personality and almost all of his patter sounded off-the-cuff and was genuinely funny. Additionally, he could make more eye contact with the audience, especially when he's

singing a ballad. The exception to this last point was his encore, John Bucchino's "Better Than I," which was as profound and heartfelt a delivery of a song as I've heard in a long time. Funny how life has a way of putting things in perspective when you least expect it, isn't it? Caswell knows that now and I encourage you to let him share it with you.

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