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A Swinging, Sophisticated New York

By [STEPHEN HOLDEN](#)

As the jazz pianist Barbara Carroll and her longtime musical partner, the bassist Jay Leonhart, happily leapfrogged through a sequence of songs about dancing on Sunday afternoon at the Oak Room of the Algonquin Hotel, words from [Stephen Sondheim](#)'s musical "Sunday in the Park With George" came to mind.

Order, composition, balance and harmony — principles that describe a Seurat painting — also apply to Ms. Carroll's serenely confident, far-sighted art. Swing — the only missing word from Mr. Sondheim's list that might describe her playing — comes from the jazz lexicon.

[Ms. Carroll](#), 80-something, shows no signs of flagging energy, technique or enthusiasm. Her touch is strong and steady; she tosses off crunching chords and solid bass lines without any fuss. "Let's Face the Music and Dance," the third song in the sequence, was lifted by a sturdy minor-key vamp. That [Irving Berlin](#) standard was preceded by "Is There Anything Better Than Dancing?" (from the musical "Nick and Nora") and "Dance Only With Me" (from "Say Darling"), both of which she sang in her signature parlando style, supplying just enough innuendo to suggest dancing as a prelude to sweeter intimacy.

The performance was the opening salvo of Ms. Carroll's seventh season of Sunday jazz brunch concerts in the [Oak Room](#). The series, whose selections change from week to week, is the closest thing to [Bobby Short](#)'s much-missed seasons at the [Café Carlyle](#). These performers don't simply distill an ideal of Manhattan sophistication over more than 50 years; in a sense, they *are* New York.

Elegant, red-haired and unfailingly gracious, Ms. Carroll is herself a finished painting: a delicate, finely boned, beautifully spoken woman who is much more resilient than she appears. It is in her ballads that she reveals herself as a dreamy musical impressionist with roots deep in Ravel and Debussy. A medley of "Autumn in New York" and "Early Autumn," arranged as a semiclassical suite, produced arpeggios of tumbling leaves and multicolored foliage.

Singing "A Love Like Ours," a song first popularized by [Barbra Streisand](#), Ms. Carroll emphasized the gravity of the phrase, "When love like ours arrives/We guard it with our lives," whose words (by Alan and [Marilyn Bergman](#)) are not to be taken lightly.

Ms. Carroll's surprise guest, Aaron Weinstein, a Chicago-born jazz violinist, joined the pair for two numbers. A sensational talent in the tradition of Stéphane Grappelli and Joe Venuti, Mr. Weinstein, who is in his mid-20s, is an inventive melodic improviser who doesn't go in for flashy gymnastic flourishes. He turned "Just One of Those Things" into a mini-marathon of swinging endurance, at the end of which you were left a little breathless.

Barbara Carroll continues on Sunday afternoons through Dec. 19 at the Algonquin Hotel, Oak Room, 59 West 44th Street, Manhattan; (212) 419-9331, algonquinhotel.com/oak-room-supper-club.