

Cultural Daily

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Dear Cultural Weekly Readers, Help Us Save the Oak Room

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Every few minutes a signature is added to a [petition to save a New York treasure – the Algonquin Hotel's Oak Room](#), iconic venue for song and the lovers of song. Some people think it's already gone, nothing but dust and memories like Penn Station and so many other lost landmarks. But it isn't gone as yet! And there is something well worth fighting for, as this beautifully-worded petition explains:

“The history of the Oak Room at the Algonquin began in 1939, when it opened as a nightclub. It went dark during World War II, but reopened in 1980. For over three decades, the Oak Room has been home to many of the world's finest musical artists. It launched the careers of Diana Krall, Harry Connick Jr., Jamie Cullum, and Michael Feinstein, and, just last season, Emily Bergl. It continued to present legends such as Jack Jones, Britain's first lady of jazz Claire Martin, jazz pianist Barbara Carroll, Julie Wilson, Jimmy Webb, and Academy Award-nominated composer Sir Richard Rodney Bennett. The greatest musicians and interpreters of song, such as jazz's Bill Charlap, Tierney Sutton, Paula West, and Kurt Elling, and cabaret's Andrea Marcovicci, Karen Akers, Steve Ross, KT Sullivan, Wesla Whitfield and Maude Maggart, among many others, have performed there.”

If you need more convincing, go to the [Algonquin's own Facebook page](#) and read the outpourings of hundreds of outraged New Yorkers and visitors alike who will not stand for this treasure to be torn from their hearts.

The beloved Oak Room is the heart and soul of the Algonquin Hotel, along with bellmen like Peter and Kevin and Eddie and yes, of course Matilda, that adorable feline. However it was the Oak Room that kept the Algonquin in the news week after week after week; in ads in the New York Times, in reviews, in column items, in constant activity in the press that they'll never generate without it. Unless Matilda gets kitty-napped on a regular basis, I'd like to see what she has in mind to get that sort of coverage! Let's face it, the Algonquin without the Oak Room isn't the Algonquin at all. The Blue Bar, I'm sorry to inform you is a fake; the original Blue Bar was lost in another renovation over 15 years ago. What they are now extending into the Oak Room is just an ordinary pub. It's not legendary. So what's to be done? Well, the petitioners are asking for compromise and I, as the entertainer with the greatest longevity in that hallowed hall (25 years), see great wisdom in it. Let the Marriott Rewards members have their lounge created by squaring off the Oak Room (hopefully not damaging any of the original paneling, sconces, and chandeliers) ... let it function beautifully as a breakfast nook, brunch spot, afternoon tea even ... but by evening ... allow it to be restored to its former glory as THE OAK ROOM CABARET for music lovers. Everyone will win and everyone will save face . . . and song will triumph. [Please sign and circulate this petition.](#)

Andrea Marcovicci, hailed as “torch singer, spellbinder, heart-breaker” by People magazine, marked an unprecedented twenty-five years at the legendary Oak Room of the Algonquin Hotel last year – the record for the most seasons ever played at the club and the final performer ever to perform there.

Photo by Vicki Stivala of Harry, the Oak Room’s head waiter for 32 years, on the last night he worked. Image © Vicki Stivala 2012.

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