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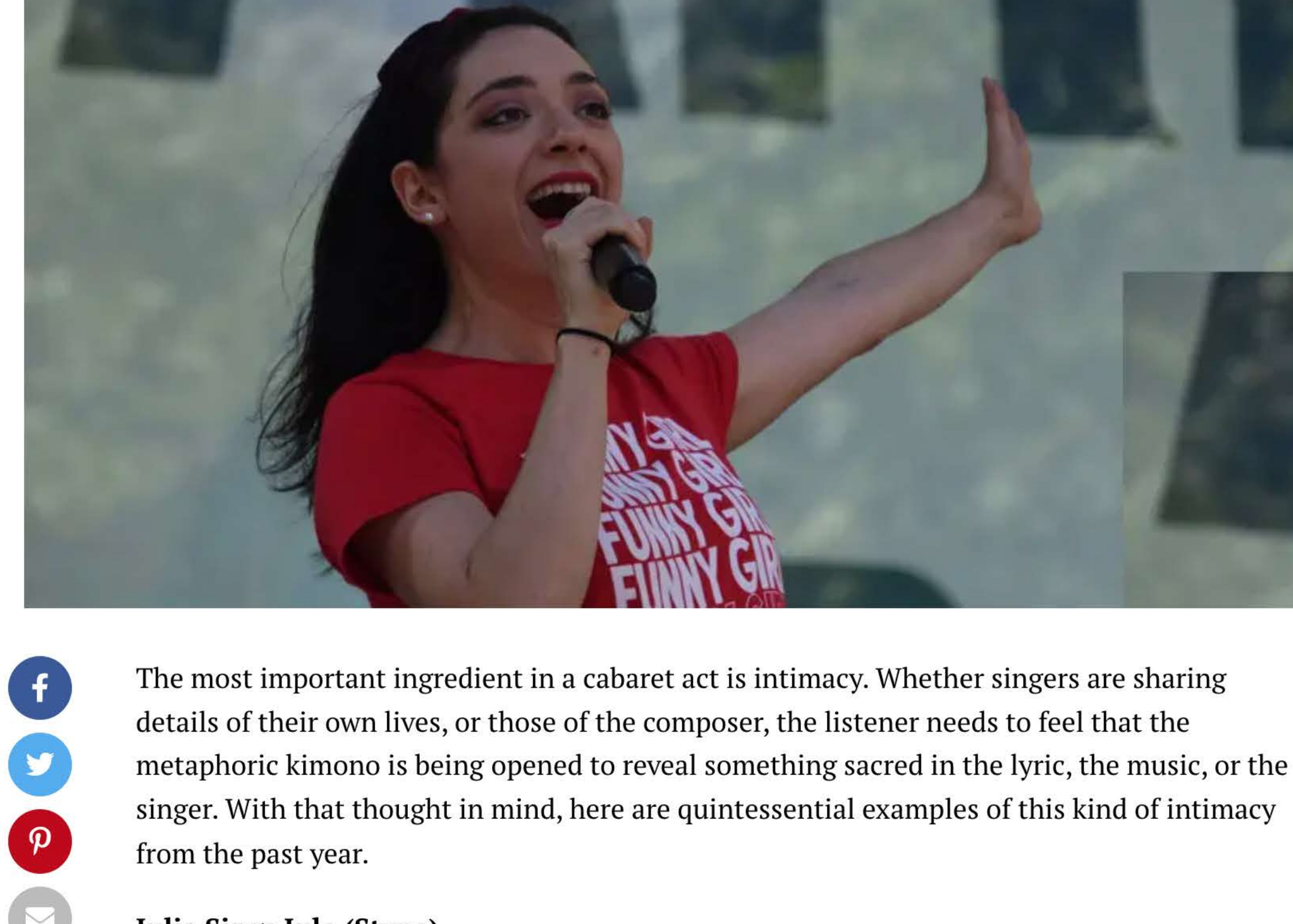
HOME - COLUMNS - ENTERTAINMENT - FEATURES - NEWS -

CABARET

Top Ten Cabaret Shows of 2023

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By **Jacqueline Parker**



The most important ingredient in a cabaret act is intimacy. Whether singers are sharing details of their own lives, or those of the composer, the listener needs to feel that the metaphoric kimono is being opened to reveal something sacred in the lyric, the music, or the singer. With that thought in mind, here are quintessential examples of this kind of intimacy from the past year.

Julie Sings Jule (Styne)

As if thrilling us as Fanny Brice in *Funny Girl* was not enough, not long after Julie Benko took over the role, she did a cabaret act at the York Theatre of the music of Jule Styne. Pray, folks, to whatever God you choose that she reprises that show here next year. Or atheists can mark their calendars for February 12 to see her live at Birdland. If you can't wait, she's currently in *Harmony* on Broadway, proving that indeed she is the greatest star!



Stephen Sorokoff
Klea Blackhurst

Speaking of Great Stars...

Klea Blackhurst joined with Jim Caruso and Billy Stritch for a Swingin' Christmas show for their annual three nights in late December, and did it ever swing! When Klea's stentorian voice announced that Christmas is Starting Now, no one doubted that she was absolutely correct. This mega-talented trio kicked off the holiday with enough energy to light the Rockefeller Tree for a month. With Steve Doyle on bass and Daniel Glass on drums came together on a Christmas classic, the audience was astounded at the presentation. That surprise awaits you next December at Birdland. See you there!



Shana Farr at Urban Stages
Winter Rhythms

Imagine Julie Andrews, Alexis Smith and Lee Remick in One Woman

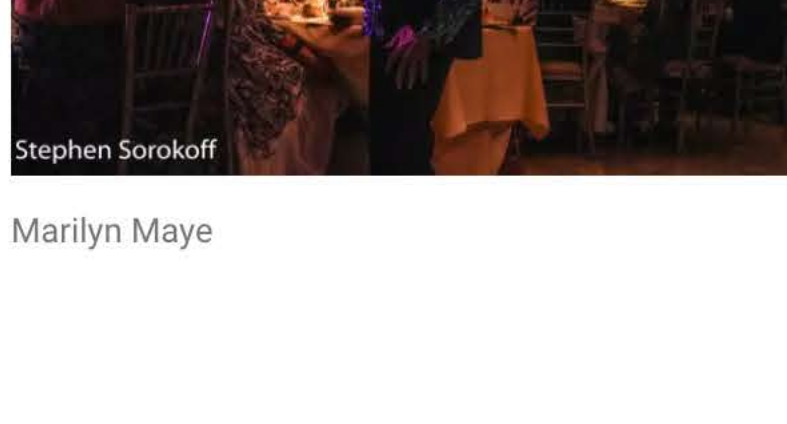
You've got Shana Farr. Throw in Barbara Cook, and what could be better? Shana did her tribute to the original Marian the Librarian at Urban Stages recently. Her show was a comprehensive review of Cook's musical career through quotes, songs, and her keen ability to change character as the songs required. Farr can switch gears from sassy to sophisticated in the blink of an eye and conveys emotion in ways rarely seen. She used the overlay of her gorgeous midnight blue gown to add yet further texture to some of the songs. I've never heard anyone do *Anyone Can Whistle* better than Shana. Come hear for yourself next year!



Jeff Harnar Photo by Kevin Alvey

Jeff Harnar sings Coleman and Sondheim

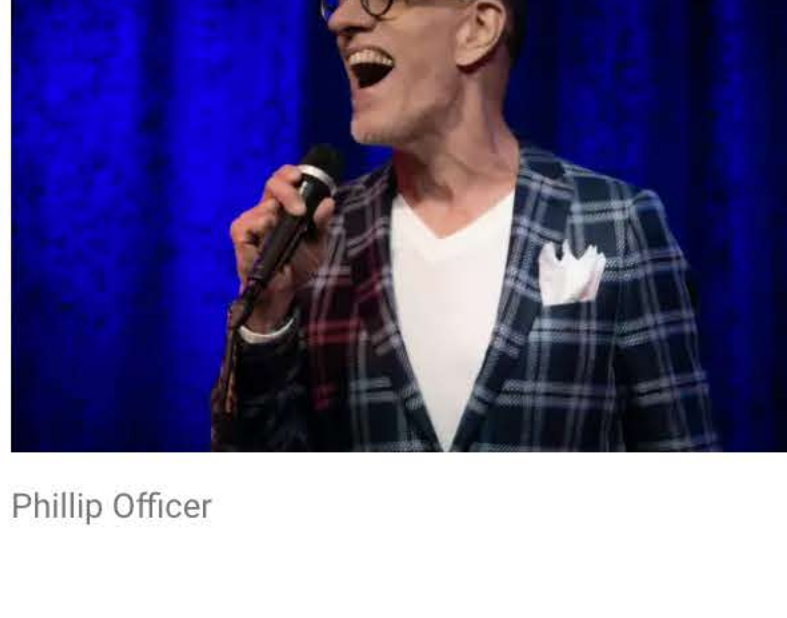
The world is lucky that Jeff's shows on these two composers are on CD. Spellbinding may seem too strong a word to describe Jeff's performances, but after you see him perform you'll be adding your own exclamation points. I'm a bit late in hopping on the Harnar bandwagon, so it is with glee that I'll be buying his CDs of other major composers while awaiting his return engagements here.



Stephen Sorokoff
Marilyn Maye

And the Queen Herself

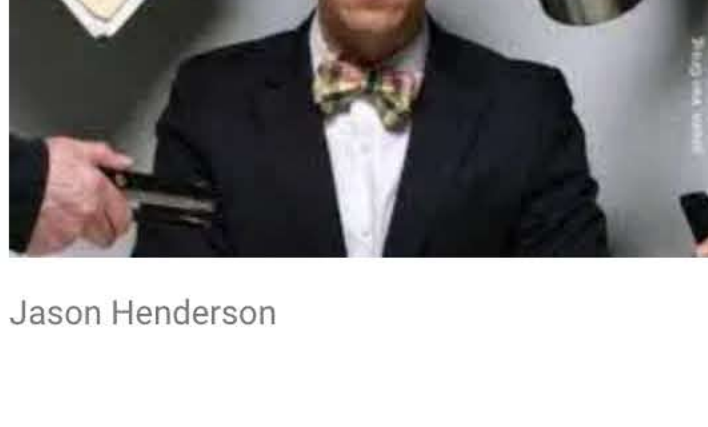
Marilyn Maye, the most amazing nonagenarian you'll ever see, made several appearances around town, closing out the year at Birdland. If you've never heard her, it should be Resolution #1.



Phillip Officer

June Was Bustin' Out This Year

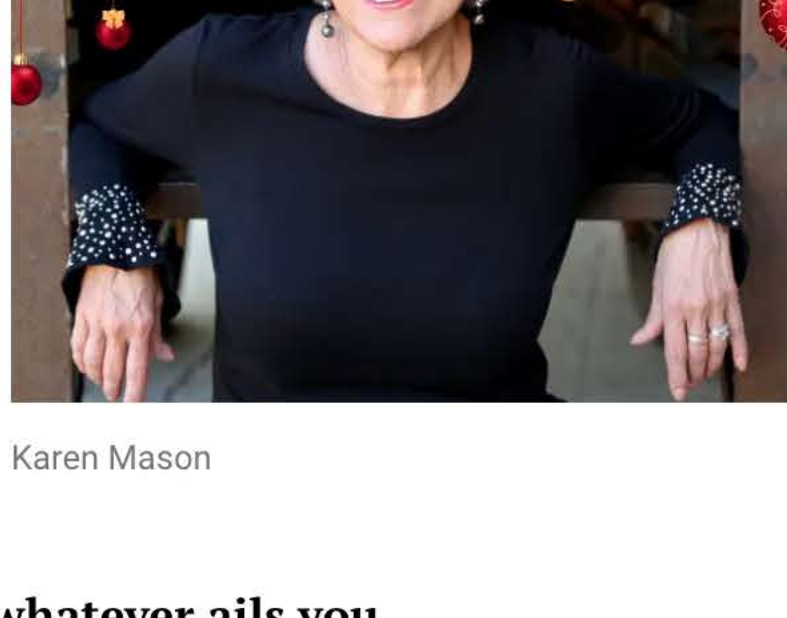
When Phillip Officer made a rare appearance at Birdland last spring, he proved how a skillful performer can take an audience away from time and space for an hour. His Oscar Hammerstein can take the audience from many years ago awakened me to his skill at interpretation. He set the bar high that night and continues to elevate it. It was like being in the company of a master of his craft, a wizard who could answer all of life's questions through masterful interpretation of cogent lyrics.



Jason Henderson

Jason Henderson – New Kid on the Block Indeed

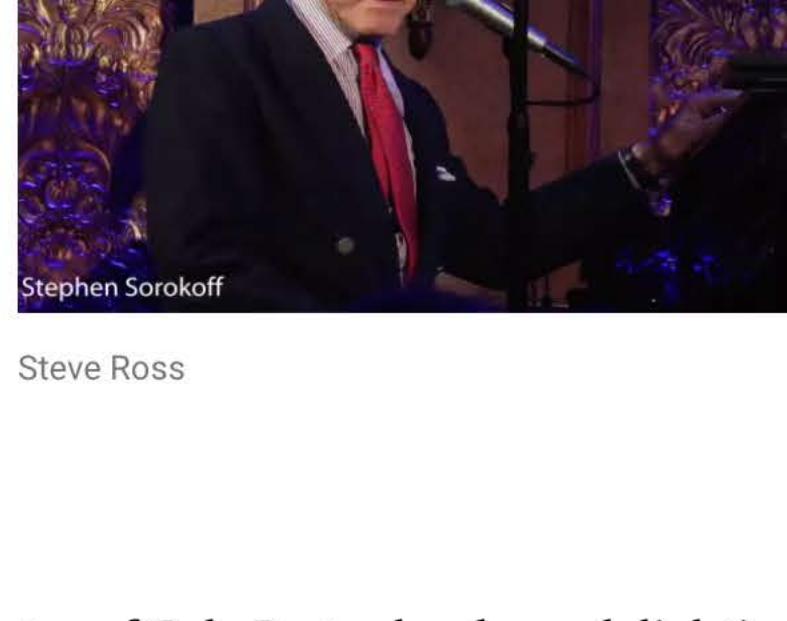
Just when I thought there was virtually nothing new to look forward to in cabaret, along comes this charming young fellow from New Zealand who wowed everyone who saw his tribute to Noël Coward at Don't Tell Mama this year, called "Getting to Noël You", his show tells the story of his life here through Coward songs. While attempts to do this usually fall apart about 45 minutes in, Jason leads this together beautifully to keep his audience captivated. A cross between Robert Q. Lewis and Tony Randall, Jason is a delight to watch and hear, which you can do on either January 24 or February 11 at Don't Tell Mama.



Karen Mason

Karen Mason – Cure for whatever ails you

Leaving one of Karen's shows in anything short of a buoyant state of mind is rare, if not impossible. If you're nursing a heart that's been broken or some material disappointment, you'll find solace in her act, and that's a promise. She appears frequently at Birdland.



Stephen Sorokoff
Steve Ross

Steve Ross

This quintessential interpreter of Cole Porter has been delighting audiences with his intelligent and masterful renditions of not only Porter, but every composer you love and want to hear. Steve is a joy to see, hear and marvel at—each evening is a perfectly crafted delight, designed to please individually and collectively. His is a rare magic on the stage—few others have it, and fewer have honed it to perfection the way he has. Whether you are a cabaret aficionado or a neophyte, an evening with Steve is a master class in appreciation of the songs so uniquely American. After all, he is the Crown Prince—wait—that's wrong. Steve is the King of Cabaret in my book.



Ann Talman

Elizabeth the First, and Only, in My Book

And in Ann Talman's as well, as we learned from her show about Elizabeth Taylor, whom she knew when they performed in *The Little Foxes* on Broadway. This loving tribute shows a rather private side of she who was considered the most beautiful woman in the world. Ann's choice of music underscored her story beautifully. You can catch it on February 25 at the Laurie Beechman.



Michael Lavine, Rob Schneider, Charles Kirsch

The Mighty Triumvirate

Rob Schneider, Charles Kirsch and Michael Lavine have been doing shows at 54 Below about musicals that never made it to Broadway, called appropriately Broadway Bound. Sounds kinda iffy, no? Well, with Rob's enthusiasm, Charles's charm and Michael's mastery of the piano, plus the collective knowledge of them all, it's a glorious evening to be had. Top notch singers perform songs you've never heard but will want to hear again. They'll be back in March – don't miss it!

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Jacqueline Parker