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Cabaret Festival heads North

By Matthew Robinson

This weekend in Newburyport, the people who make the great Boston cabaret scene thrive will take a curtain call as they close a month of performances with the second annual CabaretFest!

CabaretFest! made its debut in Provincetown last May. This year the festival is heading north to re-establish a once flourishing cabaret scene on the north shore.

"I had received calls lamenting the fact that there was no longer cabaret in Newburyport," recalls John O'Neil, the musical mind behind CabaretFest! "The locals told me that they really missed it; so I pitched them the festival."

Headlining three nights of festivities will be composer/performer Amanda Green, who has won numerous awards on the cabaret circuit. She also happens to be the daughter of lyricist Adolph Green (*Bells Are Ringing*, *The Will Rogers Follies*).

"She's a composer from a theatrical background who performs her own work," O'Neil explains. "We couldn't get anyone who was packaged more perfectly."

A Harvard graduate, Green is looking forward to coming back to the Boston area. "Boston audiences are notoriously sophisticated and appreciative," she says.

Among the experienced performers who will participate in CabaretFest! is Will McMillan, longtime host of the Cabaret Connection at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, and a singer himself. McMillan will perform as

part of the Hollywood revue *At The Movies*, which also includes singer Nina Vansuch, actor/movie buff Michael Ricca, and pianist/arranger/singer Brian Patton.

“There aren’t many songs that are written specifically for the movies anymore,” McMillan observes. “We decided that we really like the era of the ‘50s and ‘60s.” The quartet’s repertoire includes “Moon River,” “The Look Of Love,” and selections from *A Hard Day’s Night*.

During the festival, O’Neil himself will pay tribute to two multi-media artists, with revues of songs made famous by Danny Kaye and Fred Astaire. “Danny and Fred were consummate performers,” O’Neil says. “They transcended all outlets, including movies, music, theater and cabaret itself.”

Another highlight of the festival will be “Sing Me A New Song,” a revue of eighteen hand-selected pieces written and performed by local artists.

CabaretFest! will also offer dinner shows, a jazz brunch, late night performances, and workshops for songwriters and performers of all levels and interests. Venues will include Ciro’s, The Rim, The Grog, and the Firehouse Center For The Arts, which is acting as co-presenter.

For the young, 10-time ASCAP Popular Award-winner David Polansky will perform “Family Cabaret” both tomorrow and Sunday. Though the music educator has also been writing and performing children’s music for over 20 years, Polansky suggests that his music is not just for the young.

“Music for children does not have to be condescending,” he contends. In fact, Polansky maintains many parents tell him that they enjoyed the music more than their kids did.

“Everybody likes dessert,” Polansky says with a smile, quoting one of his most popular songs.

For more information about the festival, call the Firehouse Center For The Arts at (978) 462-7336.

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