

February 8, 2007

## **A Man for All Stevens**

By Brian Jewell

I was more than a little wary of reviewing *Will Loves Steve*, since all I know about cabaret is what I learned from *Cabaret*. Sure, I like show tunes and I've been to a piano bar once or twice in my life. But would that be enough to guide me through this strange new land, or would it be like making my way through France with only hazy memories of high school French to rely on?

Fortunately Will McMillan is a guide and ambassador par excellence, and the show is a treat for old and new fans.

The show is a tribute to composers named Steve, a cute hook that's broad enough to hang diverse styles on, from Stephen Sondheim to Stephen Foster to Stevie Wonder. The real unifying factor is McMillan's affection for the material, and his enthusiasm is infectious. Indeed, after inviting the audience to sing along for one song, I found myself wanting to harmonize on every song that followed.

McMillan juxtaposes songs in interesting ways; the show begins with Stevie Wonder's "Love's In Need Of Love Today," an exuberant ode that morphed into the ironic "Everyone's Got The Right" from Sondheim's *Assassins*. This was the first demonstration of McMillan's Maxim: Sondheim is a universal segue.

The intimate space at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education is a great venue for McMillan's warm and unaffected stage presence. He and his pianist Doug hammer had a great rapport and seemed to be enjoying each other as much as the crowd did, and worked together brilliantly whether bringing new nuances to familiar tunes like adding some reggae undertones to show tunes or making "Magic To Do" sound unexpectedly sexy.

McMillan doesn't shy away from being real though, with moving renditions of "Life Goes On" and a clever medley of "Connected" and "No One Is Alone." The fact that I recognized most of the songs may indicate that I was an easy convert, but I expect *Will Loves Steve* could make a cabaret fan out of anyone.