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Cabaret Is Firing Up with Will McMillan as its Booster

by Beverly Creasey

Will McMillan is cautious about calling it a “renaissance,” but cabaret seems to be “hot” again in Boston.

“Call it a smoke and mirrors renaissance,” he says, “with a small r.”

McMillan knows about pulling rabbits out of hats. He’s the magician who put together a cabaret series at the Cambridge Center For Adult Education this past year. You can see the wealth for yourself while a dozen or so performers are making the ‘cabaret connection’ at the Cambridge Center.

“Our idea,” McMillan says, “is to offer some education, some performances, and some opportunities for people to come together...we’re a humble version of a clubhouse here.” What he means is that the dimly lit, smoky atmosphere associated with traditional cabaret has been replaced by an intimate concert space which seats no more than seventy.

The space is too small for theatrical events but just perfect, it turns out, for cabaret. The smoke may be gone, but the ambience is not. A shiny grand piano dominates the stage and focuses all the attention on the music — a welcome change for singers accustomed to competing with waiters and table chatter.

“At its best,” McMillan explains, “cabaret allows performers to take songs from all over the place — country western, folk, musical theater, jazz, and pop — and bring these seemingly disparate elements together into one unique performance.”

McMillan maintains that cabaret and folk are quite similar. He cites the storytelling which is common to both, but he makes the distinction that in cabaret “there’s also the glamour of that grand piano and people getting all dressed up!”

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