

MEAT



Arts Cabaret Reviewed

By Chris Hunt

One of the problems with living in a small university town like Fredericton (which, for a town of its size in the maritimes has a hyperactive thyroid when it comes to the "arts" - largely due to the university) is that newspapers and such are forced to review events and shows that are really not presented for public scrutiny and critique. This can be very endearing at times, and while the lack of professional performances ("professional" in its legal meaning) in Fredericton is often astoundingly obvious, there is always a plethora of small, comfortable events to go to where Frederictonians can be found entertaining one another in a variety of ways (one, two, three - I was told the other day that at a lecture on journalism on campus last week a review of mine was torn apart by the lecturer for having an introduction more than thirty words long - eight, nine, ten - ah, screw 'em). And so, reviewing these things tends to take into account all this and as such must be as welcoming as the audience - no one expects a harsh, cutting review of people who are just simply getting up the courage to entertain friends, family, and colleagues. I guess I thought the *Arts Cabaret* on Saturday night was (one hundred and ninety-eight, one hundred and ninety-nine - @\$*%!!) going to be one of those events. I was pleasantly surprised to find some truly talented people (along with some who were not) putting on a show - names we have come to associate with good, solid entertainment in the city alongside those who were just having fun and making sure that this came across.

One of the more recognizable voices in Fredericton, Kate Rogers opened the show with the pertinent "Cabaret" - a good old standard delivered with power and taste. Somehow not bawdy enough for me, but hey. After some shuffling and a few words from the endearingly nervous M.C. Greg Demmons, Kwame Dawes strolled out and delivered a few choice numbers from his repertoire accompanying himself on acoustic guitar. Very pleasant, very relaxed. Next it was Carolyn McNeill and Stacy Kilburn, the Fabulous Feet.

Not being from the Maritimes, I have never really understood the obsession here with tap dancing, clog dancing, etc, but I was impressed with the precision and symmetry. Nice stuff.

We then had the annual effort from the Albert Ross English Society. The intent behind their skit was clever. One would expect, at an "arts" cabaret, to hear a lot of poetry reading and conceptual drama (precisely the kind of thing that other faculties find so amusing about arts students), and the skit attacked this idea and satirized it. There were a few uncomfortable moments and some stiff areas, but like I said before, no one expected Richard Burton.

Throughout the show there was a nice diversity of acts, showing a wide range of interests and cultures. Davis Givan and Tony Lindsay closed the first act with a series of Irish and Canadian folk songs, nicely done and interestingly chosen, with Tony Lindsay showing some real talent on the acoustic guitar.

The intermission deserves mention. At (for lack of a better term) a "formal" show, say, at the playhouse, the intermission serves to get the kinks out of your butt and lets you have a smoke and talk about trivial issues with people you happen to run into. Saturday night at the *Arts Cabaret*, the atmosphere (tastefully created) allowed you to relax and chat and feel a part of what was happening in a way that the playhouse or Aitken center just cannot. Very nice.

The second act began with an act that demonstrated again the diversity of interests within the arts faculty. "Hip Hop", a group of dancers, strutted and bopped their way through an up-beat number with enthusiasm and style.

Lori Healey stepped up after this and delivered two wonderfully intricate and nicely melodic original tunes. A wonderful voice and a great ear for both melody and lyrics, I certainly hope we will see more of her in the future. Lori was accompanied by Melanie Richards for a song who blended her soft-edged soprano into the harmonies. Well done. Good stuff.

I have often thought of Blues as a medium for the musically



Hip Hop at the Arts Cabaret

talentless, as it is so easy to learn three chord structures and simple blues riffs. This may in fact be true, but Joel Leblanc and Sam Petite certainly did nothing to reinforce the theory. Good, solid, grundgy Muddy Waters type rhythm guitar was the base for the wailings and rantings of Joel on his harp - you have to hand it to the kid - he's damn good.

We returned for the closing to Kate Rogers and her clear, vibrant soprano voice. Although "The Way We Were" has always been on my personal top ten all time annoying songs list, Kate managed to make me listen to it again with interest and appre-

ciation.

I must mention both the sound quality and the piano player. My experience with the previous *Arts Cabarets* has been one of cringing at the sound quality, pumped through the house system, the tired old in-house speakers complaining audibly and picking up CIHI throughout the show. This year was wonderful. Crisp, clean guitars and nicely rounded vocals not only make listening that much better, but I think contribute immensely to the performers confidence and execution.

Heather Richards sat in the corner and received no attention at all. She was given the thankless

job of playing the piano before the show and during intermission. She did a great job of filling out the atmosphere and I just thought it worthy of mention.

So we come to the end. I could have done without all the flower-giving and self-patting-on-the-back at the end, but that's probably just me. Overall, the *Arts Cabaret* was a pleasant experience, from the dim, candle-lit tables, to the comfortable humor and the unexpected pleasantness of being in close-quarters with both peers and pros, something I think we need more of.

TNB Presents Bordertown Café

Where do we go for great laughs, good advice and good food January 25 to February 16? Theatre New Brunswick's *Bordertown Café*. At least for great laughs and good advice you can count on TNB's third production of the season which opens in Fredericton on January 25 and performs across the province until February 16. *Bordertown Café* by Kelly Rebar is sponsored through the corporate generosity of Moosehead Breweries and Unisys Canada Inc. Theatre New Brunswick's Artistic Director Michael Shamata serves up a delightful show to welcome audiences back to the theatre in 1991. *Bordertown Café* has received rave reviews across the country. "One of the best Canadian plays to emerge in the last few years" (Montreal Daily News). "*Bordertown Café* is guaranteed to make you laugh" (Kitchener-Waterloo Record). "*Bordertown Café* is an enjoyable and satisfying play with both belly laughs and food for thought on the menu" (Stratford Beacon-Herald).

"I loved this play from the first time I read it," says Shamata. The characters are wonderful and the laughs come out of very real

and recognizable situations. I know our audiences will love it. They'll be laughing all night with a lump in their throat."

Set in a diner on the Canadian side of the US border where seventeen year old Jimmy lives with his mother Marlene, *Bordertown Café* deals with the difficulty all of us have simply saying "I love You". Marlene runs the *Bordertown Café* with her wisecracking mother, Maxine, a non-stop talker on every subject from her daughter to her n-good truck-driving ex son-in-law, her relatives, her husband and most of all her birth-place, the USA.

When Jimmy's father calls from the States and invites him to live with him and his new wife in their new home, Jimmy has until his father's "rig" pulls up to make the most important decision of his life. Marlene cannot bring herself to say the words that would make him stay. It's up to Maxine, his American grandmother, and Jim, his Canadian grandfather to offer Jimmy advice, much of which is quite surprising.

Terry Tweed directs *Bordertown Café*. Miss Tweed has previously directed The

Tomorrow Box and Lockhartville for Theatre New Brunswick. Set and costume design is by Shawn Kerwin with lighting design by Ian Pygott. Michael Mahonen, currently appearing in CBC's *Road to Avonlea*, plays Jimmy, co-starring with Halifax actress Jennifer Overton as Marlene and Shaw Festival veterans Michael Ball and Wendy Thatcher as grandparents, Jim and Maxine. "I think we've assembled the best *Bordertown* cast ever" says Shamata.

Bordertown Café opens in Fredericton on January 25, with a low price preview on Thursday, January 24. It performs in Fredericton until February 2, and around the province in Bathurst (February 4), Campbellton (February 5), the Miramichi (February 6), Saint John (February 7 to 9), St. Stephen (February 11), Sussex (February 12), and in Moncton (February 13 to 16). All performances are at 8:00 p.m. with a 3:00 p.m. matinee in Saint John on February 9. For more information call Theatre New Brunswick at 458-8344 or toll free at 1-800-442-9779.