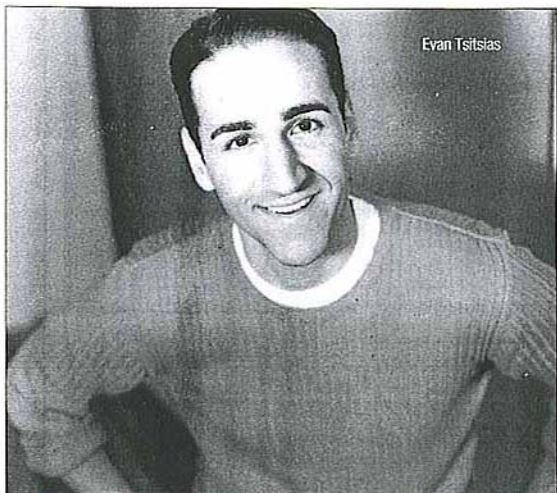


Life is a cabaret again

Actors bring the familiar songs of Kander and Ebb to the stage

by Darren Cooney



Don't Tell Mama might just be a gay man's dream come true.

The show plays up its cabaret roots with a collection of songs from well known musicals. It is a tribute to composers John Kander and Fred Ebb, the writers behind classic musicals like *Chicago*, *Gypsy*, and *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*.

Evan Tsitsias is the brainchild behind *Don't Tell Mama* and the Serendipity Co-op, the group producing the show. Tsitsias says the idea for the show came from a conversation with Sally Jones, one of the seven other members of the Serendipity Co-op. She had recently wrapped up cabaret performances in London, England, while Tsitsias had just finished reading an article about the decline of cabaret in Toronto.

"It all just seemed to come together and that's basically what serendipity is," he says. "It's people coming together for a common goal in the right time and the right place."

Tsitsias and the cast are hoping to revive the cabaret scene in Toronto. "This used to be a genre in Toronto that people loved and then it stopped," he says. Cabaret theatre is still thriving in cities like New York, Chicago and London, but it has slowly faded in Toronto. "I would eventually like to do a series of these cabarets where we use different composers each time," Tsitsias says. He lists famous composers Stephen Schwartz and Cole Porter as

potential influences for future shows.

Don't Tell Mama takes traditional and famous songs of Kander and Ebb and stirs in an androgynous twist. The cast members have reversed the original casting guidelines by substituting men for women. The music is familiar and the style is unique.

"It's all the songs of *Chicago* and *Cabaret* that everyone knows," Tsitsias says. "We've also tried to make a story line of it." He says the first act is filled with stories of lost love and heartbreak while the second act reflects the strength and courage of moving on from a broken relationship. "I think a lot of gay men relate to this music," says Tsitsias. "I think all gay men at one point have sang *And All That Jazz* in their bedrooms."

The show is made up of almost 20 songs including *Wilkommen*, *New York, New York*, and *Cell Block Tango*. Performing are Mark Allan, Suzette Araujo, Jody Butler, Jen Cohen, Sally Jones, Lori Nancy Kalamanski, and Tsitsias under the musical direction of Rosalind Mills.

The show runs — appropriately — at Tallulah's Cabaret in Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, which was Tsitsias' first choice of venue. "It's the perfect venue," he says. "For me I couldn't have asked for a better spot."

He says that the environment of Tallulah's will add to the show. "It's very intimate and the show is going to have a

very sexy, dark quality to it. Low lighting and all black, sexy costumes will add to the atmosphere."

Don't Tell Mama is choreographed and produced by the Serendipity Co-op itself. In the world of acting, a co-op is a group of professional equity actors that choose to fund and produce a show themselves. In order to do so, they use their "bonds," which are similar to a form of personal insurance in regular shows. "It allows us to create work in between shows and it's a really great opportunity," explains Tsitsias.

The production has kept Tsitsias hopping over the past months with logistical preparations, though he's been thinking about the show for years. "I've been thinking about it for so long that it's kind of a dream for me," he says. While he has been dreaming, he has also been busy photocopying posters to promote the show. "I've spent four weeks at Kinko's," says Tsitsias, laughing. "It's been insane."

Despite his hectic schedule, Tsitsias feels rewarded by the experience and feels proud of the show. "It'll be very moody but it's actually very funny as well," he says. "We've balanced it very well so there's ballads, comedy, big numbers and formation dancing."

Don't Tell Mama runs May 17 - 19 at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. For tickets call 416.975.8555