

# Don't tell mama

## What's going on in your bedroom

### ON STAGE

David Roche

**R**ODGERS AND Hammerstein, Kern and Fields, Lane and Harburg — Broadway songwriting teams are a special breed of collaborative artists.

Over and over, they meld their talents into seamless units of song, which often become standards performed for generations.

Since the mid-'60s, John Kander and Fred Ebb have proven their rightful place alongside the great tunesmiths. Their stage musicals, like *Cabaret* and *Chicago*, and the occasional film like *New York, New York* generally offer not one or two, but multiple numbers you can describe as catchy, moving or otherwise memorable.

Kander and Ebb combine superior melodies, harmonies and lyrics with a peculiar stylistic twist: They somehow write tunes that are old-fashioned without sounding

stale, quaint, or parodistic; instead, they plug into classic pop music forms and give them depth and guts.

Their collected output has inspired a group of young musical performers to mount *Don't Tell Mama*, a cabaret stringing together 19 numbers into a two-act revue.

It's not an original way to treat such material, but the format has a proven track record, one of the more famous such revues being *Side By Side By Sondheim*. As long as the song quality is there, the

revue-tribute form can go over big.

The trick is to shape the material so that some sort of continuity emerges to provide plausible tension, theme and evolution in lieu of story.

*Don't Tell Mama's* director and originator Evan Tsitsias feels they've succeeded in doing just that. This is his third try in two years to mount the production, which was inspired when colleague Sally Jones described the cabaret revues she'd done in England. And a recent newspaper feature by Toronto musical theatre expert Richard Ouzounian,

deploring the decline of cabaret locally, provided further impetus. "I thought this is the perfect time," says Tsitsias, 28, who first got the musical bug after seeing *Dream Girls* as a teen.

The final push came when the Actor's Equity waived the usual \$15,000 bond needed up front for a show of this scope.

*Don't Tell Mama's* cast of eight — including Tsitsias — all have professional experience in musicals or performing on board cruise ships.

Choreographer Jen Cohen has created what Tsitsias calls "Fosse-esque" movement for two dancers to help the transitions and segues between songs.

Fans of Kander and Ebb's big shows will find their fill of famous and obscure, toe-tapping and heart-catching numbers like "All That Jazz" and "Class" from *Chicago*, "The World Goes 'Round" from *New York, New York* and "Mein Herr" from *Cabaret*. But listen also for "My Coloring Book," an early hit for Barbra Streisand, as well as her later "How Lucky Can You Get," from *Funny Lady*.

A certain amount of gender-blind casting will be operating. "We use men to sing women's songs, women to sing men's songs.... It doesn't matter who sings [a particular number] as long as it makes sense in the story line.

"I find that gay men love Kander and Ebb," says Tsitsias. "It's kind of all the songs that gay men sing in their bedroom."



**TOSSING FOSSE.** The cast of the Kander and Ebb cabaret, *Don't Tell Mama*.

#### **DON'T TELL MAMA.**

\$13-\$15. 7:30pm.  
Thu, May 17-19.  
Tallulah's Cabaret.  
12 Alexander St.  
(416) 975-8555.