



Top: Tony Award-winning performer Alan Cumming. Middle: Allan Nachman and Sandi Reitelman, Cabaret 313 co-founders, with Cumming. Bottom: Henrietta Hermelin-Weinberg, Doreen Hermelin, and Wendy and Maddy Hiller enjoy the performance.

Life Is A Cabaret

Music renaissance in the 313.

By Susan Kehoe, Ph.D. | Photography by Christine Hathaway

When Allan Nachman and Sandi Reitelman decided to bring the cabaret musical art form to Detroit, they weren't sure how it would be received. With a 300-plus crowd clamoring for tickets to the Alan Cumming Cabaret show a few months ago, it's clear they have a winning formula for bringing world-class cabaret to Metro Detroit.

Stage and screen star Alan Cumming is known for his Tony Award-winning performance as the master of ceremonies in the Broadway revival of *Cabaret*, although he may be better known for his dramatic role as Eli Gold on *The Good Wife*. If you're saying, "Eli Gold sings?" listen to his new album, *Alan Cumming Sings Sappy Songs: Live at the Cafe Carlyle* (Yellow Sound), which is available on CD or for download.

Nachman and Reitelman are continuing Cabaret 313 with exciting cabaret singers and Detroit venues next season. A peek at the 2017 schedule shows that a couple of Broadway's best, as yet unannounced, will perform a special show on Valentine's Day weekend at the Rivera Court at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Driving to this beautiful, iconic location is far more convenient than a trip to New York and a stay in a hotel to visit the Carlyle or Feinstein's as cabaret lovers have been doing for years.

Another illustrious singer and actress coming to Detroit is recognized for her role as the witch in Broadway's *Wicked* and as an ensemble member of the NBC musical television series *Smash*. If you guessed Megan Hilty, you are on track with the current music scene. In addition, 313 looks forward to collaborating with another Detroit music organization to form an ensemble of cabaret performers to be held at the Roostertail in mid-September next year.

It's important to realize that cabaret is a different form of musical performance. The small, intimate setting is as much a part of the experience as the performance.

"It feels like a personal conversation with the performing artists who sing, tell stories about their lives and joke between songs," says Lois Shaevsky, one of the original cabaret patrons. "It's a personal experience when you sit at a small round table, so close that you can reach out and touch the singer."

When considering which cabaret entertainers to bring to the Detroit audience, Reitelman and

Nachman don't match available performers with the dates — rather, they "curate" the season. They handpick world-class performers and place them in intimate venues around Detroit, such as the Music Box at the Max M. Fisher Music Center, MOCAD and the Players Club.

"It's not about delivering star power; it's about delivering wonderful experiences," Reitelman said. "People of great talent and ability have an emotional connection with our audiences in that setting."

"Alan Cumming was amazing in his unmatched ability to connect with our audience," she said. "It sets the bar very high for us. He opened himself up. He said, 'I try to find songs to personally connect with. If they resonate with me I have better ability to connect with my audience.'"

They also introduce performers to the amazing rebirth of Detroit. Nachman said, "We invite them to come in on Friday for a two- to three-hour tour of city highlights. We take them to Belle Isle, Eastern Market and the new Red Wings stadium [under construction] in District Detroit that bridges Downtown and Midtown."

As a nonprofit organization, Cabaret 313 received a corporate sponsorship from Plante Moran Wealth Management. The Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan has also designated funding to enable the continuation of this new musical art form in Detroit.

"Only 50 to 60 percent of the operational costs are borne by ticket sales," Reitelman said. "What we are presenting artistically and experientially has served to engage a large number of committed audience members to support Cabaret 313 with individual contributions."

Nachman said, "When Sandi and I started Cabaret 313 almost four years ago, we weren't sure how it would resound with Detroit. As it happened, the beginning of this venture coincided with the beginning of the Detroit renaissance and has continued on that trajectory."

Reitelman added, "It has been truly gratifying to present artistic experiences for Metro Detroiters that they haven't had before. Adding to the cultural offerings in Detroit has been extraordinarily meaningful to us." **NS**

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