



## THE NEW YORK TIMES

### Brandon Cutrell: No Reservations

March 2004 by Stephen Holden

*The New York Times*

On Saturday night at the Duplex, Brandon Cutrell, a promising singer from Indiana, performed a nervy cabaret program that included a same-sex version of Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car" and Brian Lasser's strained monologue "Hello Tom" in which a high-school junior invites a senior to his prom. A frisky, high-strung singer who likes to belt, Mr Cutrell has a powerful voice (a better instrument, by the way, than Clay Aiken's).

When Mr Cutrell, who is only 27, hits the bull's-eye in an articulate version of "Cigarette and Chocolate Milk," Rufus Wainwright's witty exploration of addiction and temptation, he gets it right.



## BACKSTAGE

### Bistro Bits

March 2004 by John Hoglund

**Brandon Cutrell** is a sublime example of a newcomer who's, not afraid to take chances. In his new show, "No Reservations," which plays Saturdays through March 13 at the Duplex, he sings a diverse and impressive collection of cabaret, pop, and theater songs. For example, Rodgers and Hart are fused with Jason Robert Brown, Tracy Chapman, Michael John LaChiusa, Tim DiPasqua, and a Negro spiritual. It's a delightful breakthrough show by this multitalented, baby-faced entertainer. In his previous two theme shows, Cutrell (pronounced "cute-trel") paid tribute to new composers Sean Michael Flowers, Patrick Vaughn, and Andrew Lippa. His patter and structure were defined by those songwriters, there was little input about himself. and the results were mixed.

But in "No Reservations," he reveals so much more than his own personality and wacky sense of humor, wit deft direction by **Phil Geoffrey Bond** and musical direction by **Ray Fellman**. One minute Cutrell camps it up with Jay Leonhart's comical "Beat My Dog," and the next he breaks your heart with Rodgers and Hart's poignant "Little Girl Blue." Showing a real flair for comedy, he was exceptional on an overlooked novelty tune, "TV Is the Thing This Year," written by William Sanford and Phil Medley and recorded once (and only once) by the great Dinah Washington. In Rufus Wainwright's "Cigarette and Chocolate Milk" with snippets of Michael McDonald's "I Can Let Go Now." Cutrell is animated, bright, and entertaining. And while there's still a bit to go, I believe his truthfulness with a lyric, his beautiful tenor and that killer smile will get him the attention he deserves.



**TIME OUT - NEW YORK**

**The Best Cabaret of 2006**

**Issue 587: December 28, 2006–January 3, 2007**

**Adam Feldman**



**Music**

1. Paula West - Oak Room, October - November
2. Leslie Kritzer Is Patti LuPone at Les Mouches - Joe's Pub, October–present
3. Eartha Kitt - Café Carlyle, June
4. Rebecca Luker - Feinstein's, May
5. Ute Lemper: Blue Angels and Demons - Café Carlyle, February
6. Jack Jones - Oak Room, September
7. Terese Genecco: Drunk with Love - Metropolitan Room; May, October
8. Maude Maggart: Comes Love - Oak Room, February



**9. BRANDON CUTRELL: BAGGAGE - FEINSTEIN'S, JUNE**

**Moving on up to the East Side, the puckish After Party host served an intoxicating cocktail of humor, mischief and feeling. Top live show**

10. Jane White - Feinstein's, March



**TIME OUT - NEW YORK**

**Top Live Show**

**Issue 557: June 1-7, 2006**

**Adam Feldman**



**Music**

Feinstein's; Mon 5

The unwritten rule book for male cabaret singers with aspirations to popular appeal holds that they must retain an air of calculated coolness and tactful emotional restraint. But Brandon Cutrell, one of the most sheerly engaging young singers on the nightclub scene, has never been good with rules: He sings his heart out, and he's got a lot of heart to sing. The irrepressible son of a Methodist minister in Indiana, Cutrell studied opera before switching to musical theater. On Fridays, he now presides as host of the Duplex's open-mike show-tune night, Mostly Sondheim, where he often seems like a creature of pure bounce: boyishly ebullient, mischievously campy, gleefully profane.



Cutrell, 29, will surely be on his best behavior when he makes his uptown debut in a specially priced show at the swank Feinstein's. ("I'll be in a suit and I won't curse too much," he promises.) Accompanied by the beaming and proficient pianist Ray Fellman, Cutrell performs a handful of standards, but when he really gets cooking, he leans toward new American: pop tunes from the likes of Alanis Morissette and Kelly Clarkson, as well as underexposed songs by rising local composers. "Will I ever be famous? Maybe not," Cutrell concedes in a song by Tim DiPasqua, whose lyrics perfectly limn this talented singer's upstream career path in cabaret. "Would it ever really matter? No. I'm gonna do it for you."



**BROADWAYWORLD.COM**

**Brandon Cutrell: Risking and Winning**

**June 1, 2006 - Jena Tesse Fox**



In the past two years, Brandon Cutrell has earned two MAC Awards and a Bistro Award for his first three cabaret outings, sang in the ensembles of several benefit concerts, appeared in the second Broadway Unplugged concert as well as The Broadway Musicals of 1956, and earned a devoted following as the lovingly snarky host of “Mostly Sondheim,” a weekly open-mic variety show at the Duplex. And on June 5th, Cutrell’s career will take another leap forward with One Night Only, a new concert at Feinstein’s, one of the most respected venues in the city.

“Each cabaret I do allows me to make or at least try to make huge artistic leaps,” Cutrell says. “A lot of people think cabaret is really easy. I, however, think it’s an amazing artform that challenges my abilities as a musician and actor.” Those challenges, he continues, begin with the very process of choosing the songs. Out of a hundred possibilities, Cutrell, music director Ray Fellman, and director Phil Geoffrey Bond had to select fourteen songs for the concert. “I never want to pick material that is irrelevant to me,” Cutrell says. “If I can’t find a part of me that relates with authenticity to a song, I won’t put it in my show... Sometimes what you find– or the reasons for the connection– can be frightening. But that’s when you know you **HAVE** to sing the song! To quote John Bucchino, ‘if you never risk, you never win.’” Once the songs are set, they must be refined into an emotional whole. “Ray and I decide how we believe the songs should flow musically. Then, Phil joins the equation to help me with the ‘theatre’ within the songs.” That theatricality is a tightrope that can make or break a concert: too much is overwhelming and artificial, not enough leaves the show cold and emotionless. “Cabaret is all about being yourself,” Cutrell muses. “It’s easy to go to that ‘actor’ place and go through the motions of a song. It just doesn’t work in cabaret, though. People can see right through it.”

Like No Reservations, Cutrell’s most recent cabaret at the Duplex, One Night Only will not focus on any particular theme, story or composer, but will be an intimate evening of individual songs, ranging from classics by Cole Porter and Johnny Mercer to modern hits by k.d. lang and Alanis Morissette. “My style is to choose songs that mean something to me, that make me feel something in my gut, that knock me over when I actually hear the lyrics,” he explains. “That’s my theme... Songs that I, Brandon Cutrell, think are important. Not just songs that I think are pretty or cabaret-friendly!”

The two years in between No Reservations and this concert, he continues, have changed him, and given new meanings to the songs he sings. “Time changes your connection to a song in the same way time changes your connection to people, life, work, etc.,” he says. “It’s life experience. It’s emotional growth. I’ll give you a personal example: There’s a song I’m singing at Feinstein’s that relates directly to something



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that happened to me in high school. In rehearsal the other day, I told Phil, my director, that that was my connection to the song. He said, 'You're still hung up on that? Get over it already!' The point is, when I'm over it, I won't need to sing the song anymore. For now, it's in my bones, which means I'm going to sing it."

As one of the more prominent up-and-coming cabaret artists, Cutrell can see firsthand the wide range of styles in the art form, and how the genre is changing. "It can be almost anything you want it to be," he says, "because it is usually self-produced." The different styles can lead to rifts within the community, though Cutrell believes that there is room enough for all kinds. "The performers that like "old-school" cabaret will continue go that route. The performers that strive to be innovative will hopefully continue down that path."

"One thought, though," he continues. "When I competed in The Algonquin's Young Artist Competition last December, I was told the judges had a very difficult time agreeing on the definition of cabaret. Some thought it included jazz. Some didn't agree. Some thought it should be more youthful and casual. Some thought it should be more formal. Maybe that's just the point," he says. "It's whatever you make it."

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY will present Brandon Cutrell on Monday, June 5 at 8:30 PM. The show has a \$25.00 cover and a two drink minimum. Jackets are suggested but not required. FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY is located at 540 Park Avenue at 61st Street in New York City. For ticket reservations and club information, please call (212) 339-4095.



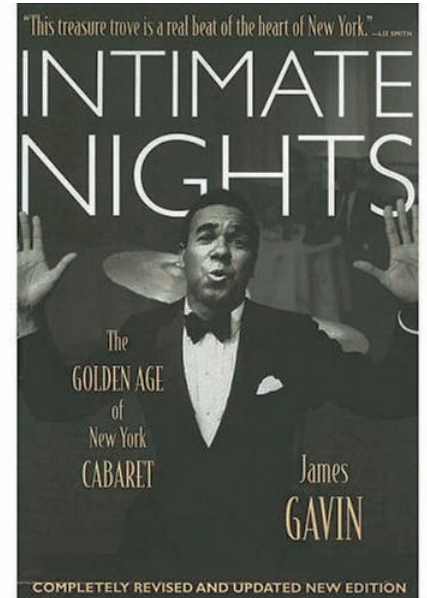
**INTIMATE NIGHTS: The Golden Age of New York Cabaret**

**By James Gavin**

**Published by Back Stage Books**

**page 412**

“The newcomers struck a high average. One of the standouts was Brandon Cutrell, a boyish blond cutie, born of a Methodist preacher in Indiana, who sang with the irrepressible gusto of a small-town kid who couldn't contain his joy at having escaped to New York. In his quieter moments, one envisioned him in his room in the old family house, dreaming of better things to come.”



**CABARET SCENES MAGAZINE**

**Brandon Cutrell: One Night Only**

**June 2006 by Peter Haas**

**Feinstein's**



“We’ve moved uptown, kids!” exulted Brandon Cutrell from the stage at Feinstein’s. And his audience - a full house of friends and fans from his work at The Duplex, in Greenwich Village - boomed back with cheers and applause. The occasion was one of Feinstein’s single-night showcases, and Brandon shone through with fine singing; an easy-going, charming stage presence; puckish humor and confidence; and a varied program that reflected his gift for bringing out a lyric’s subtleties. With a few standards sprinkled through - including an original interpretation of Old Black Magic - Brandon’s program featured contemporary songs by such writers as Michael John LaChiusa, Todd Almond, Tim DiPasqua, Chuck Coleman, Michael Ingram, Cheryl Wheeler and Mary Chapin Carpenter – the last two warmly evoking the moods of Brandon’s own Indiana small-town upbringing - and, in a lovely un-miked closing, Sean Michael Flowers’ Heaven Knows. With bright accompaniment and musical direction by Ray Fellman, supported by Julie Danielson on bass, and with smooth staging by director Phil Geoffrey Bond, the evening underscored Brandon’s continuing growth and confidence as a performer.



## **The Siegel Column**

### **A Star Is Nurtured**

**June 12, 2006**



### **Barbara & Scott Siegel**

Feinstein's at the Regency goes to the head of the nightlife class for being as commercially savvy as it is far-sighted. Some time ago, the club began to offer special, one-night only performances by up-and-coming entertainers on what would otherwise be dark Monday nights at this ritzy boite. For these shows, the room knocks down its usual hefty cover charge to something more middle class and lowers the minimum in order to entice audiences to experience cabaret artists who are new to the art form or are simply less famous than the club's usual headliners.

The policy would appear to be working. Recently, rising star Brandon Cutrell got his shot at Feinstein's after having been favorably reviewed last year at The Duplex by Stephen Holden of The New York Times. Cutrell's friends, family, and fans came out in large numbers to support him. The evening paid off for the club in the short term but, even more important, Feinstein's did its part to help bring a talented entertainer to another level. The rest, of course, was up to Cutrell.

A Feinstein's credit means a lot in the entertainment world, and all concerned knew what was riding on this performance. Cutrell arrived on stage to one of the biggest ovations we've ever heard at this venue, even for stars like Rosemary Clooney and Brian Stokes Mitchell. He gave his supportive audience good reason to cheer: With his great sense of humor, strong acting, and considerable vocal skills, he delivered the kind of show that turns "promise" into national bookings.

Supported by musical director Ray Fellman at the piano and Julie Danielson on bass, Cutrell took command of the room and let the audience know unequivocally that "Tonight's the Night" (Gershwin). Entirely comfortable on stage, he made the transition from hosting the raw and rowdy Mostly Sondheim open microphone gig on Friday nights at The Duplex to a still sassy but controlled presentation; his downtown personality remained intact, but he skillfully tailored it to make it appropriate for Feinstein's. Nor did he buckle under and come up with a program of songs to appease the uptown sophisticates. Instead, Cutrell won over any doubters with a carefully chosen mix of great material written largely by contemporary songwriters such as Alanis Morissette, Todd Almond, and Tim DiPasqua.

Under the wise direction of Phil Geoffrey Bond, the show -- titled *Baggage* -- fully displayed the singer's personality, with obscure songs like "Halley's Comet" (Chuck Coleman) and "My Old Addiction" (David Wilcox) used to excellent effect. Perhaps most successful of all was a story/song arc in which Cutrell shared his Indiana roots: "I Know This Town" (Cheryl Wheeler) and "I Am a Town" (Mary Chapin Carpenter).

In his enthusiasm, Cutrell talked a bit too much and the evening was a tad too long. But that's understandable, given that this was the first time out of the gate for this show. The rough edges will surely be smoothed over easily, and soon: In July, Cutrell will cart his *Baggage* to the Laurie Beechman Theatre at the West Bank Café. (Phil Bond has taken over as booking manager there.) For this performer, the future is now.



## TALKIN' BROADWAY

### Concerts and Cabaret

Thursday June 1, 2006



### Rob Lester

Brandon's Brand Of Cabaret  
Cutrell Prepares To Sing at Feinstein's At The Regency

"Imagine this," director Phil Geoffrey Bond guides singer Brandon Cutrell, who nods and listens, occasionally scribbling notes, "On top of all your other problems, you've just opened your wallet and realized that you don't have enough money to pay for the breakfast you ordered. Let that show on your face."

Phil is working with Brandon on a big number in which he needs to comically portray a man under pressure. That feeling is not too hard to capture - the vocalist is less than a week away from a major coup: he's booked for a night at Manhattan's posh and prestigious night club, Feinstein's at the Regency, where the most glittery of cabaret names hold court. He has been chosen to do a solo show on June 5th as part of their Monday night series showcasing newer talent and he knows it's a big step.

In this rehearsal, all of Brandon's considerable energy is going into making the most of every moment in the rollicking blues number, "Early in the Morning," an old specialty of Louis Jordan. Brandon scrunches up his all-American boy-next-door face, and his eyes become slits. He begins to seethe. I've heard the song three times in a row, but I'm laughing for the first time. Something is beginning to work. Something is beginning to click. He's not just singing now, he's coloring the words with emotion, sharpening his timing, finding ways to vary the lines that repeat. His face shows rage, exhaustion and an amusing amalgam of embarrassment and confusion. Pianist Ray Fellman eggs him on, pounding away on the keyboard to drive the piece to a climax. "We'll keep working on it," says Phil, matter-of-factly, conscious of the precious time booked in the rehearsal studio.

They go through several songs, including a tender ballad and a comic showpiece, "It's the Christian Thing to Do," by Michael John LaChiusa. That song is part of the multi-songwriter song cycle depicting the seven deadly sins introduced by Audra McDonald. Anger is the sin du jour, as the character portrayed tries to suppress it and turn the other cheek after a break-up. The fun comes in the failure of that effort, and this gives full reign to Brandon's bag of tricks, and schtick, refined and reigned in by Phil.

Singer, director and pianist are a comfortable trio; they've been working together for a long time. Brandon recalls, "Phil, in his role as Director of Programming at The Duplex Cabaret Theater, called and said The Duplex wanted to try to fill the cabaret room on Fridays after 11 p.m., as the room had been sitting empty at that time. He asked if I'd host a Sondheim open-mic party for the month of October, 2004. We're still running!"

Many people know the singer from nights in that series, called Mostly Sondheim, that stretches well into the wee small hours of the morning. With tireless Ray at the piano (he seems to be able to play anything), Brandon sings and jokes and introduces other performers, both polished pros and ambitious amateurs, some emboldened by the consumed beverages of the alcoholic variety. "I'm so loud and saucy and crude in that show. When I'm not performing, I'm very quiet." Those who have been in attendance at these brash bashes and only know this image may find that difficult to believe. He presents a ranting, boisterous anything-goes persona in that environment, but that's just one side of him. Those who attended the recent Broadway By The Year: Musicals of 1956 concert witnessed his sensitive side as he plaintively crooned "It Must Be So," from *Candide*, as well as stepping comfortably into musical comedy shoes. His solo cabaret shows and guest appearances have also shown his versatility. At his second home of The Duplex, I've caught him this season turning serious in revues tributing Joni Mitchell and Nancy LaMott.



## **PAGE 2 OF TALKIN' BROADWAY**

"[Nancy] died ten years ago, but I still learn from her when I listen to her CDs." Asked for others whose work he admires, he lists, "Andrea Marcovizzi, Karen Mason, Lisa Asher, Gabrielle Stravelli - she's the newcomer to watch - my cohorts, Phil Bond and Ray Fellman. All of these people teach me so much about music and interpretation. I try to be a sponge whenever I'm around any of these people."

The sponge has also been soaking up praise and honors. Brandon won the BackStage Bistro Award for his work, and has two MAC Awards: one for Best Debut, and last year he picked up the Male Vocalist award for his Duplex show, No Reservations, which had many reservations, running for four months, directed again by Phil Bond. And Brandon is understandably excited and proud to have been added to the soon-to-be-released, updated version of James Gavin's fascinating book, Intimate Nights: The Golden Age of New York Cabaret. With a nod to Phil's re-energizing of The Duplex, the author states:

"One of the standouts was Brandon Cutrell, a boyish blond cutie, born of a Methodist preacher in Indiana, who sang with the irrepressible gusto of a small-town kid who couldn't contain his joy at having escaped to New York. In his quieter moments, one envisioned him in his room in the old family house, dreaming of better things to come."

"I desperately wanted to be a Contemporary Christian singer. For a few years, I was in a Christian singing group called S.O.S. which was an acronym for Season of Song (the "season" part was based on Ecclesiastes 3:1). We toured all over Indiana." Coming from a religious family has its challenges, he admits. "Being in a preacher's family means always living in a glass house. A parish usually expects the preacher's family to live up to the same standard as the preacher. That's when things get difficult. My mom, who also grew up a preacher's kid, was really good about teaching us how to keep things in perspective and not ever take things too seriously. Basically, she taught my brother and me to set our own standards and focus on meeting those. We were told from the very beginning to just be ourselves. I think that's pretty unusual for a preacher's family. Anyway, it's quite the scene when I go to my parents' church back in Indiana with my hot Jamaican boyfriend. You can hear the whispers in the next town! My mom and dad are such great sports about it all."

The religious upbringing finds a place in his cabaret presentation. It's there along with song choices ranging from pop hits of Alanis Morissette and k.d. lang to standards by Harold Arlen, Johnny Mercer and one from Cole Porter ("Let's Misbehave," naturally). The Feinstein's set doesn't have a "theme"; however, upon reflection, the entertainer reflects, "I must admit many of my connections to the songs I have chosen are rooted in my childhood and adolescence."

He is adamant that cabaret is "very relevant to younger people." His future plans include more singing and acting, and his next big project is to record his first CD. Recently, he began accepting offers to direct other singers' cabaret shows. He also loves to travel, and recently spent some time in Rome with boyfriend, Angelo.

His schedule this week is focused on numerous rehearsals for Monday, and it gives him pause to try to put everything in perspective. The usually offhand young man admits, "I had a 'pinch me!' moment when I found out Feinstein's was booking me. I'd be lying if I said it wasn't also really cool to sing onstage in The Oak Room at The Algonquin" (where he was named a Finalist in their Young Artist Competition). "I grew up in the outskirts Columbus, Indiana. My backyard was literally a cornfield. I used to perform at the Bartholomew County 4-H Fair in Columbus. I'd sing in the barns or the shelter houses, wherever they put the stage any given year. I loved every minute of it. Sometimes it just makes me laugh when I'm onstage at a fancy place like Feinstein's or The Algonquin. I sometimes think to myself, 'How on earth did I get here?'"

(Like the old joke about getting to Carnegie Hall, the answer is: "practice, practice, practice." And some drive and real talent has helped, too.)

Feinstein's At The Regency will present Brandon Cutrell on Monday, June 5th at 8:30 p.m., with musical director Ray Fellman on piano and Julie Danielson on bass. The show has a \$25 cover and a two-drink minimum. Jackets are suggested but not required. The address is 540 Park Avenue at 61st Street in Manhattan. For ticket reservations and club information, call (212) 339-4095. Tickets are not available online. More on this performer, including audio clips at [www.BrandonCutrell.com](http://www.BrandonCutrell.com)



THEATERSCENE.NET

## Broadway By The Year: 1956

April 3, 2006

### Simon Saltzman



The golden age of the American musical theater reached its peak in 1956. No, that's not an overstatement. It was the year of *My Fair Lady*, the musical that many musicologists consider the greatest of them. It was also the year that legitimized and popularized the crossover score (between opera and musical theater) with Frank Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella* and Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*.

The tired businessman, nevertheless, found what he presumably yearned for in such light musical comedy fare as *Li'l Abner*, and *New Faces of 1956*. Other musicals that year were custom tailored for such stars as Ethel Merman (*Happy Hunting*), Judy Holiday (*The Bells are Ringing*) and Sammy Davis Jr. (*Mr. Wonderful*). Not all the above were hits, but they all should have been based on the quality of the singing by a handsome ensemble on Monday night April 3, 2006 at Town Hall where yet another edition of the BBTY series delighted a full and enthusiastic house.

Many of the usual suspects were rounded up to sing and cavort their way through the nicely balanced selection. Hardly demanding, this revue of familiar and unfamiliar show-tunes has, however, arrived at a point where its creator, writer, host Scott Siegel might want to re-consider the staging for this now predictably-formatted nostalgia-propelled revue. As directed with efficiency by Emily Skinner, this pleasant edition might have benefited from a more punched-up vision. Skinner, who delighted as one of the 10 participating singers, may have been limited by the lack of opportunities for dancing and humor, factors that significantly changed previous editions. This time choreographer Denis Jones was a little stingy with his contributions, with the exception of "I'm Available" (*Mr. Wonderful*), a show-stopping knockout number with cartwheels and splits created for leggy and luscious Rachele Rak of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*.

This was one edition that would have also been better with more singers foregoing hand mikes. You only had to hear the audience response to Skinner and Marc Kudisch following their rhapsodic duet "My Heart is so Full of You" (*The Most Happy Fella*) to know what a return to real sound means to lovers of the musical theater. Except for the concerted finale "Make Our Garden Grow" (*Candide*), the revue was grievously deficient in this audience pleasing consideration.

As genial host Siegel reminded us in his always endearing and informed opening monologue, 1956 gave birth to the first videotape, the Snooze Alarm, the TV remote, and Playdough. More importantly Grace Kelly married Prince Ranier and Dean Martin divorced Jerry Lewis. Oh, there was more but I got tired of scribbling notes in the dark. Broadway had 12 new musicals that year, but only 9 were on the bill. However, one – Ben Bagley's *The Littlest Revue* (with a score mostly written by Ogden Nash and Vernon Duke) broke with the series tradition as it was produced Off-Broadway. Despite a cast that boasted Tammy Grimes, Joel Grey, Charlotte Rae, and Larry Storch, it only ran for 32 performances). One of its songs "Summer is a-Comin'" was given a jazzy interpretation by the ever supportive Ross Patterson Little Big Band.

**The show opened smartly with "Standing on the Corner" ( *Most Happy Fella* ), as Devin Richards, Brandon Cutrell, and John Egan gave the eye to an assortment of flirty femmes.** From the same show, Christine Andreas sent her shimmering soprano through the plaintive "Somebody Somewhere," and comely baritone Brent Barrett connected with "Joey Joey," one of the most beautifully introspective ballads in the musical theater repertoire. "If I Had My Druthers" from *Li'l Abner* gave Marc Kudisch and Ashley Brown (the current Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*) an excuse to take off their shoes and put on jeans. "I'm Past My Prime" sang a worried but hardly past her prime Brown to another Dogpatch resident John Egan.

There was a fine *Fair Lady* sampler with Barrett reminding us that there are more than 2 notes in "I've Grown Accustomed to her Face" (Rex Harrison famously talked through it), and Egan (the current Max in *The Producers*) displayed his creamy tenor voice with "On the Street Where You Live." Andreas, who played Liza in the 1976 Broadway revival, sang "Show Me," and "I Could Have Danced All Night" with a disarming radiance.

Comedy, when it appeared, was in good hands. Connie Pacht and Egan were amusingly paired for "Don't Tell Me (...I know, I know)," the sole and eminently amusing offering from *Happy Hunting*. Pacht had the audience laughing aloud with her raucous delivery of "April in Fairbanks" from *New Faces of 56*. Brown used her coloratura with bravura through the difficult and giddy "Glitter and Be Gay" from *Candide*. **With great charm, Brown and Cutrell extracted the satiric essence of "You Were Dead You Know," Barrett embraced "My Love," and Cutrell found the elegant simplicity in "It Must Be So," all from the same melody-infused masterpiece.**

Kudisch, who starred in the revival of *Bells are Ringing*, displayed his signature panache with "I Met a Girl," and "Just in Time," the latter partnered perfectly with Skinner. Richards, currently in *The Pajama Game*, was wonderful indeed as he gracefully moved through a scat-infused *Mr. Wonderful*.

Andreas reminded everyone that "The Party's Over," but only a few needed a reminder that the next BBTY is on May 1 when 1968 is year of choice.



## EDGE

### Broadway By The Year : Musicals of 1956

Wednesday Apr 5, 2006



### Robert Fuller

It would be easy to label Town Hall's Broadway by the Year Series as nostalgic, but it would be wrong. Sure, as creator and host of these evenings devoted to songs from a given Broadway year, Scott Siegel's sort-of-corny but brisk and informative tidbits and name-drops generate too much knee-jerk oohing and aahing (I'm still not sure why the mention of Charlotte Rae caused such commotion), but the overall mood isn't self-satisfaction. What Siegel has created is without peer. At once intimate and celebratory, the series defies and betters its own premise: You don't leave saying "They sure knew how to write songs back then!" You say, "Isn't musical theater grand?"

On Monday, April 3, Siegel and Town Hall presented Broadway Musicals of 1956, featuring songs from *Bells Are Ringing*, *Candide*, *Happy Hunting*, *Li'l Abner*, *The Most Happy Fella*, *Mr. Wonderful*, *My Fair Lady*, and a revue called *New Faces of 1956*, under the direction of Emily Skinner. If it didn't quite match the ebullience and variety of last month's 1930 edition, it was nevertheless terrific. Accompanied by the excellent Ross Patterson Little Big Band, the veteran performers sang the 50-year-old songs with the right blend of the traditional and the contemporary (a balance crucial to every entry in the series, lest they come off as either perfunctory history lessons or indulgent ensemble cabarets). **Devin Richards, Brandon Cutrell, and John Treacy Egan opened the show with a smooth *Standing on the Corner***, followed by Christine Andreas (more on her in a bit) singing *Somebody, Somewhere*, both from *The Most Happy Fella*. Marc Kudisch and Ashley Brown did a spritely *If I Had My Druthers* from *Li'l Abner* (a song in which Abner shuns the come-ons of a beautiful girl - now just what kind of druthers are we talking about here?). Brent Barrett banished all thoughts of the non-singing Rex Harrison with his rendition of *My Fair Lady's I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face*, and Connie Pachtl, bare legs exposed between heavy boots and winter coat, made April in Fairbanks seem a rather sexy and logical proposition. (My friend smartly commented on Pachtl's knack for sustaining the humor in what is essentially a one-joke song well past its early punchline.) ***Candide's You Were Dead You Know*, sung by Brown and Cutrell, seemed a bit too rudderless out of context, but Kudisch faced no such limitations performing the giddy *I Met a Girl*, a song he'd already made his own in the 2001 revival of *Bells Are Ringing***. Egan sang *On the Street Where You Live* (one of my favorite songs) with the difficult mix of courage and vulnerability it requires (it usually lacks one or the other), not to mention an exquisite voice. Andreas, who played Eliza in the 1976 revival of *My Fair Lady*, a fact one can scarcely believe by just looking at her, responded by nailing *Show Me*, one of the most difficult songs in the songbook. After Brown and Egan performed *I'm Past My Prime*, Kudisch and Skinner ended the act with an unmiked *My Heart is so Full of You*.

Highlights from the second act included two strikingly different songs from *Candide*: Brown milked *Glitter & Be Gay* with astounding manic glee, **and Cutrell delivered a haunting, almost unbearably controlled *It Must Be So* - a quiet dazzler of a performance**. Rachelle Rak thrilled and frightened the crowd by doing splits during the evening's lone dance number (choreographed by Denis Jones), as part of her bouncy rendition of *I'm Available*, originally performed by Chita Rivera in the Sammy Davis, Jr. vehicle *Mr. Wonderful*. Richards took on the legend of Davis himself, ably and energetically tackling *Too Close for Comfort*. Barrett -- from name to mane the epitome of the tall, dark, and handsome leading man -- put his too-suave tendency to good ironic use as the romantically restless Joey, Joey, Joey, his pronouncedly modulated vocals dripping with self-consciously genuine beauty.

Other songs filled out the act, but I want to make special mention, again, of Andreas, and her performance of *I Could Have Danced All Night*, easily the best-known song in the show. She didn't reinvent it exactly, but she gave it a tinge of mature resignation; she was Eliza grown up, playful yet softly, contentedly aware that nothing lasts forever. The performance and the evening were a perfect representation of what is so special about the Broadway by the Year series' sadly limited output: It's not new, but certainly not "old" - and though it certainly could keep us happy all night, it leaves us looking forward to tomorrow.



**BROADWAYWORLD.COM**

**Brandon Cutrell: No Reservations**

**March 23, 2005 - Jena Tesse Fox**



One of the best benefits of frequenting piano bars like The Duplex is that one often gets to see the next generation of cabaret artists as their stars ascend. Kate Pazakis made waves in January with her autobiographical *The Sexless Years*, and earlier this month her cohost of the Duplex's Mostly Sondheim series, Brandon Cutrell, brought back his acclaimed show *No Reservations* for two all-too-brief nights. Living up to the title of the piece, Cutrell doesn't hold back on his song or style choices and, with Phil Geoffrey Bond's strong direction, makes the evening an unexpected joyride through many emotional landscapes.

Blessed with a voice like raw silk and a mischievous smile that can fill a stage on its own, Cutrell not only does justice to the composers' work, he may be a lyricist's best friend. He takes special care with the text of the songs, finding nuance in the words and putting the emotion of the song front-and-center. Whether performing witty, saucy jazz numbers ("TV Is The Thing This Year" by William Sanford and Phil Medley, or Michael John LaChiusa's "See What I Want To See"), energetic comedy ("A Summer in Ohio" from Jason Robert Brown's *The Last Five Years*), songs of excruciating embarrassment ("Hello, Tom" by Brian Lasser) or heartbreaking ballads (a medley of Reid/Shamblin's "I Can't Make You Love Me" and Michael McDonald's "I Can Let Go Now"), Cutrell performs with honest emotion so pure it can leave an audience breathless. His rendition of Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car," not an obvious choice for a cabaret, is particularly effective, emphasizing the emotional arc of the song from hopeful to hopeless. Similarly, Cutrell vividly brings back all of the many complex emotions of the teen years with Lasser's "Hello, Tom," an unconventional half-a-telephone-conversation song about an invitation to a dance. And, of course, on the lighter side is his sweet rendition of Jay Leonhart's "Beat My Dog," which evokes Audra at her sassiest but takes the song in a new, more romantic direction.

If the song list of *No Reservations* seems a little ballad-heavy, Cutrell more than makes up for the somewhat somber tone of the tunes with funny banter and stories that nicely connect the numbers into a cohesive whole. Whether talking about his college years in Ohio ("I'm big in Dayton!" he regularly boasts), about searching through libraries tighter than Fort Knox for rare sheet music (it was worth the effort), or simply joking around with audience members and music director Ray Fellman, he never lets the mood become too dark. Cutrell's joy and love for his art is infectious, and no matter how intense or heartbreaking the song may be, a well-placed smile can lift the mood instantly.

At last week's final performance (for the time being, one can only hope), cabaret and Broadway star Karen Mason stepped up to the mic to perform her friend and frequent collaborator Brian Lasser's "Better Days," which, like "Hello, Tom," Lasser composed for her. Her affectionate reminiscences of her friendship with Lasser gave the song a new, poignant meaning.

Before the obligatory encore, Cutrell wrapped up the many different emotional threads of the evening with a gentle and lovely rendition of Tim DiPasqua's "You," one of the more emotionally bare songs to hit the cabaret circuit in several years. As an encore, he, Fellman, and Karen Mason sang an unamplified, a capella Negro spiritual by Walter Hawkins, "I'm Goin' Up A Yonder," a suitably optimistic finale to the all-too-brief evening. With any luck, *No Reservations* will be back soon, and until then, drop by the Duplex on Friday nights after 11:00 to hear Brandon Cutrell and Kate Pazakis belt down all the stone walls on Christopher Street.



PLAYBILL.COM

The Leading Men: All I Ask of Hugh

March 2004 by Wayman Wong

Finally, I recommended **Brandon Cutrell's** new cabaret act with "No Reservations," sight unseen, last month. Having gone to the opening, it's a pleasure to report that this 2003 MAC Award winner has turned in his best show yet. The boyish tenor, 27, is laugh-out-loud funny with an old Dinah Washington tune, "TV is the Thing This Year", but it's his vibrant vocals and excellent acting that steal the show. Backed by the lovely **Lisa Asher**, Cutrell closes his show with a compelling a cappella version of the spiritual "I'm Going Up A Yonder". As directed by **Phil Geoffrey Bond** and musical directed by **Ray Fellman**, Cutrell's stock will be definitely going up yonder itself. He plays again March 6 and 13 at 7PM at the Duplex, 61 Christopher St (212.255.5438). Visit [www.brandoncutrell.com](http://www.brandoncutrell.com)

**CABARET SCENES MAGAZINE**

**Brandon Cutrell: No Reservations**

**April 2004 by Peter Haas**

**The Duplex**



A particular pleasure of going to cabaret over time is seeing younger performers keep growing. Case in point: Brandon Cutrell. Making his New York cabaret debut in 2001, he was the instrument, in earlier shows, for specific songwriters. Now, in *No Reservations*, at the Duplex, he comes into his own as a thoroughly engaging entertainer with imaginative taste in programming. In his late 20's, with a face like a shining full moon, Brandon mixes a warm tenor voice with musical theater skills to provide a show of primarily contemporary numbers. Highlights include Rufus Wainwright's *Cigarette and Chocolate Milk*, sung with sweet humor; Jason Robert Brown's fun-filled *Summer in Ohio*; Brian Lasser's poignant *Hello Tom*; and Scott Keys and Rob Hartman's moving *Love Me in the Light*, as well as numbers by Jay Leonhart, Tracy Chapman, Michael McDonald and others. A bow to the poast is Rodgers and Hart's *Little Girl Blue*, in a syncopated arrangement that holds its own with its more modern stage-mates. With Lisa Asher as special guest, Brandon, an Indiana preacher's son, recalls his roots with an unliked spiritual, *I'm Goin' Up Yonder*. The show's lighting becomes an art form in itself, thanks to tech director Thomas Honeck. A special "ride to the rescue" plaque goes to Jeff Waxman, who learned Brandon's show in two days for the March run after its original musical director, Ray Fellman, broke an arm. Phil Geoffrey Bond directed.



## The Siegel Column

### Catch A Rising Star

June 27, 2002



### Barbara & Scott Siegel

The show at Don't Tell Mama is called entitled. (lowercase and with period included), and you're entitled to know why you should see it. You should see it despite the fact that it's casual to a fault, played too much to an in-crowd of friends and colleagues. And you should see it despite the fact that the original music written for the show by Sean Michael Flowers and Patrick Vaughn is distinctly mediocre. You should visit this cabaret production for one reason, and one reason only: to see and hear its scintillating star, Brandon Cutrell.

As a cabaret debut, entitled. is an act of great courage, because its star doesn't sing a single song you will know. Flowers and Vaughn have written a few genuinely good tunes for Cutrell, but the rest of the time this young performer is doing everything in his power to turn straw into gold. And faster than you can say Rumpelstiltskin, he does it; even if only fleetingly, Cutrell makes some of the show's lesser songs glow.

Possessing a bright, clear, Broadway-style singing voice, this young theater-trained performer is a remarkably poised, quicksilver actor. He looks like he's fourteen but he seems to possess the musical theater skills of a veteran. His talent as an interpreter of lyrics is on dazzling display in the show's strongest segment, written by Flowers. It's a two-song dramatic arc, in which Cutrell first describes an incandescent descent into romance in "I'm Ready" before a slide into heartbreak with "Cleveland." In the first song, by far the better of the two, Cutrell sings with a fluttering poignancy, at once innocent and daring; it's a winsome and winning combination. The second tune has its moments, but Cutrell turns those moments into memories--he's that good.

Cutrell's decision to make his cabaret debut in a show of all original music has its plus side. Rather than performing a show of standards, in which his version of every song might be compared to some classic rendition of the past, his performance of brand new tunes allows him to be judged purely on his own merits. And those merits are many. He has a flair for musical comedy, equally impressive dramatic skills, and a polished sense of timing that he puts to use for both. Just as impressively, he seems to know who he is as a performer. He brings his youthfulness into focus in a song called "The Kids Back Home", and there is an appealing self-awareness in his performance of the show's smartly written finale, "I Have an Ending."

Though the show has a loose and unpolished structure, punctuated by Cutrell's playfully adlibbed patter, virtually all of the songs are tightly directed. The direction by Phil Geoffrey Bond has energy and makes full use of the performer's talents. From the act's sharp, no-nonsense start to a raucous comedy number in which the madcap nature of the tune is enhanced by Cutrell's use of three different microphones, there is always a knowing directorial touch somewhere in evidence. There is also a nicely orchestrated arrival by guest singer Kristy Cates, who sleekly and effectively emerges from the audience mid-song to join Cutrell on "Wherever You Are."

Singer/songwriter Michael Holland was another guest who charmed the audience, both with his patter and his two songs, each of which he performed while playing the guitar. Cutrell, Cates, and Holland are all associated through Phil Geoffrey Bond's Storefront Theater, further suggesting there's a cabaret clique here that is really clicking.

Brandon Cutrell's show can next be seen on Tuesday, July 30th at 9:15 pm at Don't Tell Mama.



## **GAY CITY NEWS**

**CUTE AND CONNECTED: Brandon Cutrell reveals inherent talent Mama's**



**July 19 - July 26, 2002**

**Volume One, Issue 8**

**Chris Byrne**

Anyone in show biz knows that it's important to have-- and keep-- good connections. As the cliché goes: it is who you know. It's very fortunate then for Brandon Cutrell to have met the producer of his current cabaret show during the production of a musical called Goin' Buggy. The fact that it was a grade school musical in Indiana and Mr. Cutrell played a grasshopper only adds to the serendipity of the story. And while I am no fan of such Wild-Kingdom themed enterprises, I must say I'm sorry to have missed that one, for Mr. Cutrell must have exhibited some nascent talent. All of which has helped him blossom into his current, sophisticated and largely insect-free act at Don't Tell Mama.

The reprise of his earlier debut show, entitled, Mr. Cutrell is a confident and very accomplished singer/actor who performs ten new songs by the team Sean Michael Flowers and Patrick Vaughn. The songs are wonderfully wry and tuneful, covering such topics as infatuation with second-string female TV stars and the hypocrisy of George W. Bush. There are also some more traditional cabaret-style ballads, as well, including the surprisingly poignant "Boyfriend On Sundays," which uses hackneyed rock and roll chord progressions to say something heartfelt and new. I particularly liked "Cleveland" and "I Have An Ending," not just for the songs themselves but for Mr. Cutrell's committed performance. Rather than "styling" the music, he inhabits the world of each song, making it very real and finding the truth in each of the lyrics-- which are all strong.

The show has settled into a regular run at Don't Tell Mama. It's a wonderful showcase for all involved and an exceptionally well-conceived and performed cabaret.



**NEXT MAGAZINE**

**David Hurst**

"[Brandon Cutrell is a] cabaret luminary."

**THE VILLAGE VOICE**

**Brandon Cutrell: Feinstein's at the Regency**

**May 31 - June 6, 2006**

**Vol. LI, No. 22**



**David Finkle**

How come American Idol never gets around to singers who not only hit the melody but also understand that lyrics are not just words on which to practice torturous melisma but phrases that actually mean something? Right now Manhattan has any number of good candidates, and here's one of them.