

A Performance with a Purpose

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Cabaret Le Chat Noir is hosting a performance tonight at 7:30 p.m. That's not unusual. The swanky stage where various plays and musical performances are seen is usually dark only a few nights a month. What is unusual is that hostess Barbara Motley is giving away all the money that's collected at the door for this evening's special show. It's a fundraiser for two local performers who will be participants at the seventh annual Cabaret Conference at Yale University. Amanda Zirchenbach, affectionately known as "Mandy" and Lisa Picone, a recent Big Easy Award winner for her work in "Assassins," are due to travel to New Haven in just a few more weeks. The expense of travel and the course fee for the two will take a considerable toll on their personal finances. So, in order to publicize the fact that two New Orleanians will be members of the class of 2009 and to spirit them on their way with wads of cash in hand, Cabaret Le Chat Noir is hosting a combination performance and silent auction this evening. The Cabaret Conference at Yale University has played host to a number of talented New Orleanians including singers Amy Alvarez, Julia LaShae, Suzaune McKamey, Natasha Ramer, Anais St. John and pianists Harry Mayronne, Jr. and Jefferson Turner. Auditions are held across the United States and around the world (this year London, UK). Le Chat Noir serves as one of the venues for the auditions with each hopeful applicant singing two numbers; one, an upbeat, comic piece and the other a slow, more introspective song with patter between the two. Judges want to see they have the very best applicants from each region and offer only 40 slots each year to work with seasoned faculty members like Julie Wilson and Alex Rybeck, who critique each student, tear them apart and hone them into better cabaret performers in a nine-day course that is held on the New Haven campus. What makes this year's benefit show even more special is that Lisa Picone is finally making her way to Yale after last year's scare with breast cancer. Picone was given a slot this year after she had wowed judges in 2008, but was forced to bow out after her regimen of chemotherapy prevented her from attending the course. Picone's fellow classmate Mandy stepped into Ricky Graham and Jefferson Turner's Renew Review while Picone was on the mend. So, the two have history between them. Soon they will be making history on the historic Yale campus.