

Pamela Tate – Saving Cabaret

by Charlene Giannetti

”WomanAroundTown.com,” March, 2009

There are many wonderful venues in New York City to experience cabaret, being up close to a singer—accompanied by a small musical ensemble, or sometimes just a piano—wrapping her voice around a gold standard by Cole Porter or George Gershwin. Heaven! Even New York has watched some of its famed locales like Rainbow & Stars, close. The situation is dire in other parts of the U.S. where cabaret is disappearing.

Pamela Tate is working hard to make sure that doesn't happen. A noted cabaret singer in her own right, Tate is Associate Director for the International Cabaret Conference at Yale University. In March, the conference organizers held auditions in nine cities around the country, as well as in Toronto and London, to find singers to participate in the ten-day summer event, from July 31 through August 9. Those selected will have the opportunity to work with an award-winning faculty and talented consultants. Classes will hit the high notes of what it takes to succeed on the cabaret stage: technique, acting, material research, comedic development, working with a musical director, press relations, and booking. Five days of concerts will be open to the public and always sell out quickly.



“It’s a really amazing program with an amazing faculty,” said Tate. “I believe it’s one of the very few programs making an effort and managing to keep the art of cabaret alive.”

This year will mark the seventh for the conference and Tate said she is excited by some of the developments. “We started to have participants come from Minneapolis,” she said. “They created a cabaret association and now have a very active scene.” After conference organizers held auditions in Atlanta, things have begun happening there, too. “Those who participate in the conference from Atlanta will return and reinvigorate the scene,” Tate said.

Tate’s cabaret roots go way back. She first moved from Indiana to New York in 1973 and started putting together her own cabaret shows. She performed in more than a dozen cabaret clubs and many, including Kelly’s Village West, the Reno Sweeney Piano Bar, and the Grande Finale, are now gone. She contacted Erv Raible, a longtime cabaret director and coach, “the grand old man of cabaret in New York City,” and the two developed a productive working relationship.

When 9/11 happened, Tate was living across from the World Trade Center. She lived in a hotel for a month and then moved to the Upper West Side. Raible was inundated with phone calls from musicians furiously composing. “A way to process everything that was happening was writing songs about it,” said Tate. Raible put together “The Musical Response,” to showcase these compositions. “He knew the trauma I was in and he pushed me to participate,” she said. The program ran for three months and was “very cathartic.”

Raible is the Executive Artistic Director and Master Teacher, for the Cabaret Conference. Tate would often appear as a guest artist until two years ago when Raible asked her to become Associate Director. Raible, Tate and the other conference officials are now winnowing down the applicants to a pool of around forty who will be invited to participate.

Tate’s work with the conference, however, is only one hat she wears. In 2005, she was watching *Ship of Fools*, the Stanley Kramer movie based on the novel by Katherine Anne Porter. She knew she wanted to transform the story into a musical. Within six months, she had the legal rights from the author’s estate and began to write and compose with Raible a collaborator. Noting that it took Steven Spielberg five years to bring *The Color Purple* to the screen, Tate understands she still has a long way to go. “I’m feeling really great [about the project],” she said.

Tate no longer auditions for acting jobs (her last stage role was in Patrick Shanley’s *Defiance*, in Woodstock), although she has an impressive list of credits and casting directors still call. She also has produced two CDs of original music—*Die Happy* and *Dancing on the Pyramids*—as well as her debut cabaret CD, *Something Wonderful*. She has been a prolific writer for the stage and her plays have won her many awards.

She and her husband, Harvey Freedman, have two children, a daughter Allyn Spacek, a teacher, and a son, Mark, a freshman at George Washington University’s Elliot School of International Affairs.

From 2007 to 2008, Tate was head coordinator for Next Step! Men’s Shelter at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue on West 68th Street. “It was a huge job and incredibly rewarding on many levels,” she said. “I encourage every person to find some time to volunteer for any worthy cause. If everyone found a way to volunteer even once a month, we’d be looking at a very different world.”

*Tate’s website is www.pamtate.com
For information on *Ship of Fools, The Musical*,
go to www.shipoffoolsthemusical.com*

*For more information on the Cabaret Conference, go to:
www.thecabaretconferenceatyale.com*