

Our Own Kind of Universe

Local performer aims to revive the art of cabaret

By **Richard Schultz**

The Valley's desert persona can, at times, extend to its cultural offerings. What is commonplace in other parts of the country is often more rare and more difficult to find here.

Often described as a short program or floorshow offered in a nightclub setting, cabaret falls into this category. But one local performer hopes to ignite new interest in this art form that's steeped in tradition.

Hector Coris, an East Coast transplant who moved to the Valley with his partner in 2010, is determined to find an audience by launching what he hopes will be an ongoing series of cabaret style shows.

"Cabaret performance virtually doesn't exist in Phoenix. It's just so different from anything else being offered in town," Coris said. "I hope to ... really give Phoenix a taste of what I like to call 'New York style' cabaret."

Knowing Coris' background and passion for cabaret, David Hock, executive producer of the Scottsdale Musical Theater Company, suggested SMTC rent the Studio Theatre at Tempe Center for the Arts and "give it a whirl."

Coris is an award-winning vocalist and director who has appeared in numerous musicals around the Valley, particular with the Scottsdale Musical Theater Company where his performance as Max Bialystock garnered rave reviews in *The Producers*. He has also written the lyrics to several acclaimed musical comedy revues.

"I have many peers from the New York cabaret world and other parts of the country whom I admire and happily call friends," Coris said. "They provide inspiration for this new venture. Broadway vocalists



like Barbara Cook and Patti LuPone lead this great double life of acting in musicals and then doing smaller, personal concerts."

The performance, *Our Own Kind of Universe*, is a result of Coris' preparation over the past five years as he has been assembling a set list since his first solo show in New York in 2009. He acknowledges it was tough to narrow down the list of his favorite songs including works from well-known songwriters like Kander and Ebb, Lyle Lovett, Stephen Sondheim, Harry Nilsson and Rufus Wainwright. He also plans to incorporate works from somewhat obscure names like Joe Iconis, Christine Lavin, Zoe Lewis, and David Friedman.

"I chose songs that had a unique point of view, as well as songs that I could put a distinctive spin on. Eventually, a theme emerged. The title of the show is part of a David Byrne lyric. It's like a slideshow of portraits and stories that point to how one looks at the world and how the world perceives the person. The songs have both a universal and global perspective seen through a tiny microscope."

Coris will share the stage with Marina Blue Jarrette, who played "Ulla" in *The Producers*.

Jarrette will open the show with a set of her own.

"Once I heard her sing, it was a no-brainer who I wanted to join me for this inaugural event," Coris said. "No matter what she sings, she sounds magnificent."

The Producers music director Curtis Moeller also joined Coris and Jarrette and created inventive arrangements that evolved throughout rehearsals.

Coris, along with Hock, hope to curate a series of cabaret performances to feature some of the Valley's best talent in the future.

"It might take a long time to build an audience, but I think once people catch on that this type of programming exists, it will soon become a regular occurrence. It can have a life of its own," Coris said. "Cabaret is so rewarding. I'm hoping that more performers in town will take up this gauntlet of telling stories and sharing songs. There's just nothing like it."

Our Own Kind of Universe

7:30 p.m. April 6

Tempe Center for the Arts

700 Rio Salado Parkway, Tempe

Tickets: \$20; 480-350-2822

scottsdalemusicaltheater.com

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