

Cabaret festival features Bennett tribute

By: Robert Sokol
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Didn't spring for tickets to Tony Bennett's recent performance at the Black & White Ball?

You can still get a taste of Bennett-style crooning as Bay Area performer Russ Lorenson opens "Benedetto/Blessed: Celebrating the Life and Music of Tony Bennett" at the Eureka Theatre this week.

The show is the anchor of a new cabaret festival called "Something C.O.O.L." that runs throughout June.

"There's such dearth of performance space in town right now for local singers," Lorenson says. "The Razzz Room will book local artists, but they also have so many others to fit in. I was talking with Tom Orr and we came up with the idea to do something in a theater rather than a cabaret."

That theater, the Eureka, is home to 42nd Street Moon, where Orr has performed often.

The festival became something C-O-O-L — an amalgam of initials — with the addition of Carly Ozard and Connie Champagne, though Champagne had to drop out due to scheduling conflicts.

Lorenson and Bennett have never met, though the former has seen the latter perform on various occasions.

"I've connected with his daughter on Facebook and they are aware of the show, but nothing official," Lorenson says. "People keep saying I should ask to meet him to do a photo for promotional purposes, but that just doesn't feel right to me."

His reticence around exploiting a face-to-face does not mean Lorenson would not welcome a Bennett get-together.

"I'd love to just have a chance to sit and talk with him about music," he says, "to ask him questions about some of the songs he recorded or, perhaps more interesting, did not record."

While he considers it closer to a theater piece than cabaret, Lorenson does not impersonate Bennett.

"It's more of a biographical exploration," he says. "The really great thing is that the show is so flexible. I've been doing a version of it for about five years now. Tony recorded so many popular songs that I can add almost any tune and call it a Tony Bennett song."

He has, in fact, done a version of the show with a female singer, who picks up tunes by Rosemary Clooney, with whom Bennett had a long friendship reaching back to the early days of their careers.

No plans are in the works yet to find a doppelganger for Bennett's most recent collaborator, k.d. lang.

"There are some folks I can think of who'd be perfect for it," Lorenson says, "so you never know!"

IF YOU GO

Russ Lorenson

Where: Eureka Theatre, 215 Jackson St., San Francisco

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Fridays, 6 p.m. Saturdays, 3 p.m. Sundays; closes June 27

Tickets: \$25

Contact: (415) 674-3863, www.brownpapertickets.com



Kicking things off: Crooner Russ Lorenson opens a monthlong cabaret series with a show celebrating the music of Tony Bennett. (Courtesy photos)