

• MARK COFFIN •

REVIEWS

Talkin 'Broadway, Sound Advice, by Rob Lester, April 6, 2007

KURT WEILL IN AMERICA - CONCERT CAST

...This is a studio recording made in April and May of 2006 based on November 2005 concerts that were part of the 92nd Street YM-YWHA's Lyrics and Lyricists series. The generous 48-page booklet includes many photos from that event, plus bios of the songwriters and performers and background information on the Weill songs and all of their lyrics...Mark Coffin is consistently engaged and engaging, even finding fresh and intelligent turns of phrase in the old warhorse "September Song," and he honors "Lonely House" with an aching emotional reading that shows and knows just enough restraint. Also entertaining are his spry and sly moments in the solo "Oh! The Rio Grande (The Cowboy Song)" and a duet with Jeff, "Wouldn't You Like to Be on Broadway?"

A Musical Return to 1933, When Mackie Was in Town New York Times March 21, 2002 By STEPHEN HOLDEN

Few people know that in 1933, two decades before the legendary Off-Broadway production of "The Threepenny Opera" opened in New York, a different English-language version of the Brecht-Weill show arrived on Broadway and lasted for only 12 performances. One of the high points of "The Broadway Musicals of 1933," Monday's season-opening concert of the Town Hall series Broadway by the Year, was Mark Coffin's rendition of "The Legend of Mackie Messer," the 1933 forerunner of "Mack the Knife." Mr. Coffin, a little-known cabaret performer of exceptional interpretive savvy, delivered a sly, sinister performance that was a dramatic tour de force.

Mr. Coffin was one of five singers gathered for a concert that demonstrated that with astute casting and direction (by Ray Roderick) you don't need A-list stars to have a thoroughly satisfying showcase. The five, accompanied by a pop quartet led by Ross Patterson, covered the broad stylistic territory — from operetta to Charleston-flavored, kick-up-your-heels novelties — that represented the Broadway musical during the depths of the Depression. For raucous comic playfulness there was Mary Testa; for dreamy marzipan arias, Anne Runolfsson and George Dvorsky; for the 1930's equivalent of soul, Mary Bond Davis; for suave knowingness, Mr. Coffin.

The New York Theater Wire Review by Brandon Judell

...As for the night's songsters, there was the powerhouse comedienne Mary Testa from "42nd Street," the debonair George Dvorsky last seen in "The Scarlet Pimpernel," the marvelous Mary Bond Davis, recently in "The Women," the understated Mark Coffin, and if you are a soprano fanatic, Anne Runolfsson (James Joyce's "The Dead").

A major highlight came from the Broadway flop, "Three Penny Opera." Yes, it flopped back then, no doubt due its unevenly translated lyrics. (We had to wait eleven more years for Marc Blitzstein to get it right.) Still, Mark Coffin took on this "The Legend of Mackie Messer," telling the tale of the vicious Macheath with a tantalizing restraint that made his take all the more diabolical. The crowd went wild.

Talkin' Broadway.com By Jonathan Franks

In March of 2001, Scott Siegel, best known as a theater/cabaret reviewer and author (usually with his wife, Barbara), started a series of concerts at Town Hall that focused on recreating a snapshot of Broadway musicals year by year. Three of the concerts have been released on CD so far (I'll cover the most recently released, Broadway Musicals of 1940, in an upcoming column).

The second album, *The Broadway Musicals of 1933*, is even more engaging, focusing as it does on shows and numbers more obscure and forgotten. While the CD contains an echo-chamber sound not present on the first (which is correctable by tweaking one's stereo settings: oddly enough, having my stereo set to its "rock" sound field cleared it right up), the performances and song choices make up for any sound deficiency.

This time around, the composers are Irving Berlin (*As Thousands Cheer*), Jerome Kern/Otto Harbach (*Roberta*), the Gershwins (*Pardon My English* and *Let Them Eat Cake*), and Kurt Weill/Bertold Brecht (*The Three Penny Opera*, which had its disastrous premier in 1933). The 1933 album contains even more premier recordings than the 1943: "Never Fear" (from *Champagne Sec*, a version of Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*), "Ooh I'm Thinking" (a cute number from *Strike Me Pink*, by Lew Brown/Ray Henderson, that could have been lifted from *Ain't Misbehavin'*), "Swapping Sweet Nothings With You" (*Hold Your Horses*), and the original translation of "The Legend of Mackie Messer" (a very dark version of "Mack The Knife" from *Threepenny Opera*, which better illustrates the power of the original German and is expertly delivered by Mark Coffin).

Standout stars are Mary Testa (a fantastic "I'll Be Hard To Handle" from *Roberta*), George Dvorsky (a thoughtful and tender "If I Love Again" from *Hold Your Horses* by Ben Oakland/J.P.Murray) and Mark Coffin ("Mackie Messer" and "Let's Call It A Day" from *Strike it Pink*). Other singers featured on the album are Anne Runolfsson and Mary Bond Davis.

Broadway by the Year: 1933 Variety.com Apr.1,2002 By Robert L. Daniels

Producer-writer Scott Siegel kicked off a second season of "Broadway by the Year," mining the gloomiest days of the Great Depression to reveal some of the sunnier show tunes from 1933. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president, prohibition ended, and Adolf Hitler came to power. Half of the theaters on Broadway were dark, and while 13 musicals opened, only three were successful. Theatrical archaeologist Siegel and his attractive cast of Broadway performers recalled the fun and fancy of the Great White Way as it was nearly 70 years ago.

Mark Coffin's wispy tenor framed the Gershwins' "Isn't It a Pity?" from "Pardon My English," with a subtle fresh lilt. He also offered a chilling take on "The Legend of Mackie Messer" ("Mack the Knife") from Kurt Weill's "The Threepenny Opera," a 1928 triumph in Berlin that nosedived on Broadway after a mere 12 performances.

ATOMIC The essential guide to Retro Culture (atomicmag.com)

By Leslie Rosenberg

...What do you get when you mix timeless Broadway melodies with a dash of musical history and narrative schtick? The answer is *Broadway By the Year*, a witty, educational, lyrical series celebrating its second season at New York City's Town Hall...

Broadway veterans Mary Testa, George Dvorsky, Mary Bond Davis, Anne Runolfsson and Mark Coffin delivered each song with a heartfelt appreciation for the material, uplifted by musical director/arranger/pianist Ross Patterson and The Ross Paterson Little Big Band. In between numbers, Siegel educated his audience with amusing anecdotes about the circumstances that led to in a song's creation, and perhaps the reasons it fell into obscurity...

Back Stage By David Sheward

...Mark Coffin's "Mack the Knife" with the original translation (not the famous

Marc Blitzstein adaptation used in the later Off-Broadway “Threepenny Opera”) was creepy and effective....

Totaltheater.com By Simon Saltzman

The brainchild of its genial and informed host and popular critic/author Scott Siegel, Broadway By The Year moves into its second season with a modest but vastly entertaining show that commemorates many forgotten and now fabled songs: “The Broadway Shows of 1933.”

Without sets and costumes and offering little of what you would call choreography, five charming performers -- Mary Testa, George Dvorsky, Mary Bond Davis, Anne Runolfsson and Mark Coffin -- bring their winning talents to a melange of musical-theater melodies.

...Perhaps my favorite moments arrive with the reserved but knowing interpretations of Coffin, who exquisitely sings “Call It A Day,” from Strike Me Pink. But it’s his chilling rendition of the original and stunning pre-Blitzstein lyrics to “The Legend of Mackie Messer,” from The Threepenny Opera that knock our socks off. For those who love obscurities, Coffin and Testa combined for the delicious “Swapping Sweet Nothings With You,” from Hold Your Horses (an 11-week flop)...

LMLMusic.com Max Preeo - ShowMusic Winter 2000-01

Take a glance at some of the top vocalists in the best cabaret rooms and you will rarely see a gimmick or a prop. Of course, there is Julie Wilson’s boa, but that is more of a trademark than a prop. Over the past few months I have seen some of the best in cabaret -- Wesla Whitfield, Michael Feinstein, Tom Andersen, Jack Donahue, Marilyn Volpe, Andrea Marcovicci, Mark Coffin, Courtenay Day, Charles Cermele, Scott Coulter, Eric Michael Gillett, Annie Hughes, Baby Jane Dexter, Jeanne MacDonald, Barbara Brussell -- the list goes on -- and most of these shows had a theme, but nary a gimmick or a prop. These are folks at the top of the cabaret list. They just go out there and “sing the songs!”

Out Magazine

October, 2001 by David Finkle

MARK COFFIN looks, talks, and behaves like something alien beamed down by Scotty. “I’m a flexible man,” he sings in a lyric by Dave Cantor. He surely is, as he uses his supple voice, long face, and lanky limbs to get across his quirky messages. The worldview Coffin offers audiences when he sidles through his often esoteric repertoire is as complicated and shadowy as a carnival midway and has the same garish fascination. Coffin can be sampled at www.MarkCoffin.com.

Village Voice, July 31, 2001, by David Finkle

MARK COFFIN He beams his act in from a strange planet. It’s accessible to human beings, however, since he knows our language and many of our songs and gives them superb otherworldly treatments.

Out There, Back There, Up There, & Going There

Attending a Mark Coffin show is like tuning in to a late-night deejay broadcasting from a parallel universe. In between songs, he goes on— sometimes aggressively, sometimes soothingly—about what’s clicking across his mind. The circuitous gab, analyzed closely, doesn’t yield an enormous lot of clarity, but it’s riveting—you don’t want to touch that dial. so what that his compulsive spiel about living in

the now sounds like the teachings of a roomful of inebriated Zen masters filtered through Baba Ram Dass as reinterpreted by Jean Shepard. “Go out and look at a piece of gum.” I think he said during one rumination. “You know what I’m saying,” he continued. I didn’t know what he was saying, but it didn’t matter.

What matters—what Coffin has to teach anyone interested in performing in Cabaret today—is that the tall lanky lad in his red shirt and black leather trousers has found himself on stage. Or, perhaps, has found a unique stage persona that appears to be him. He’s a man who knows exactly how to command a room, a man so in touch with who he wants to be that, as a result of his conviction, he glues his audience to every note and gesture. He does wonderful things with those notes—extending them, going hard and then sweet on them, waiting for them; and he does wonderful things with those gestures—touching the microphone with two anointing fingers at the end of a song, putting a finger to his lips in hesitation, brushing a hunk of air as if it were a floating emotion.

Although what Coffin says about seizing the day might not register from moment to moment, his songs have a cumulative effect. They do what only the best cabaret performers think to do: add up to a view of the world. For him life is complicated, shadowy, silhouetted. (“Shadow” and “silhouette” are words that show up in his songs more than once.) Getting through the daily grind requires finesse, luck, and love. The songs he chooses to make his points include Dave Frishberg’s “Slappin’ the Cakes on Me”, Tom Lehrer’s “Old Dope Peddler”, Hugh Priestwoods gorgeously defeated “Ghost in This House”, Tom Petty’s “Room at the Top”, and an hilarious patter song by Jim Infantino called “Stress” that’s like a rewrite of Meredith Wilson’s “Trouble” for the anxiety age. Backed by Ross Patterson and Matt Turk (who mirror the man’s every mood), Coffin has one show left, this Friday, May 11, at the FireBird Cafe. Consider it necessary.

‘Thou Aeronautical Boll Weevil, Illuminate Yon Woods Primeval’ The New York Times, October 24, 2000, By Stephen Holden at the Cabaret Convention Tribute, Town Hall

“... If much of the stage talk was numbingly hyperbolic, the tribute succeeded in drawing an artistic portrait of Mercer, who died in 1976, as a wistful comic dreamer and dexterous wit with Southern roots whose lyrics reveled in nature’s fecundity. But beneath the humor lurked a strain of pure folk poetry that the pop-jazz singer Mark Coffin uncovered in his quietly lucid rendition of “Skylark,” Mercer’s 1941 collaboration with Hoagy Carmichael.”

The Cabaret World Convenes at Town Hall, Backstage, Mar 5, 2000, By Barbara & Scott Siegel

“The ASCAP Night is always the ticket to ride. The Johnny Mercer Tribute featured an emotional appearance and touching performance of “One More For the Road” by Margaret Whiting. There was also a surprise visit from her one-time accompanist Barry Manilow who impressively performed “When October Goes,” the Mercer song for which he supplied the melody. Also that night Tom Andersen was thrillingly ethereal singing “Whistling The Dark Away.” Mercer Foundation songwriter honorees Craig Carnelia, Steven Lutvak, and Amanda McBroom sang Mercer tunes with as much skill as they write their own songs, which is saying a mouthful. Mark Coffin set himself apart as a pointedly fresh and original talent by performing two Mercer songs accompanied only with a bass. Edgy and cool, you could palpably feel the heat of his performance. He did more for larks (singing “Skylark”) than anyone since Betty Buckley (“Meadowlark”).

Town Hall - 1999, InTheater , Oct. 25-Nov. 1, 1999 by Barbara & Scott Siegel

..."One of the things the convention does best is to take either a performer or a song (or both) and thrust them into prominence. There were several such momentous occurrences on the ASCAP night. Mark Coffin performed Amanda McBroom's "Wheels" with so much originality and depth that he instantly marked himself as the convention's Find of the Year; he had the evening's emcee, Andrea Marcovicci, in tears."

**Welcome to the Club, Lesley Alexander's Cabaret Update, Nov. 12, 1999
(Simulcast on WRTNFM/WVOX-AM)**

"And finally, this is one of those times you sit back and say-ahhh, this is what cabaret is all about. There's a guy named Mark Coffin, young guy, years ago when the incomparable Hildegard hired him to join her on stage she recognized that extra something. This year he stopped the Cabaret Convention. It's not that he's doing all the great standards (although he's doing a few including a unique take on The Best Is Yet To Come) on the contrary, he's got a varied program. Some of the songs are, to be quite frank, odd. But every moment he's on that stage is an adventure. Coffin is present in a way that's visceral, that's magnetic, that's so right, that even on material that's not what one might consider cabaret fare, Coffin delivers a riveting performance. And when he sticks to writers like Amanda McBroom then watch out. On "Wheels" he rides an emotional wave opening the core of this gem making it a stream of ever rising positive energy. Put Coffin on a Mercer lyric and you could bottle him like Southern Comfort. He's jazzy, sexy, "free and easy". Coffin delivers up a raw honesty no matter what the song. Thelonius Monk, Tom Lehrer, Dave Frishberg are all represented. Mark Coffin is what you call daring. It's what you call real. It's what you call cabaret and he's at Judy's only two more Mondays. Get there..

Welcome to Cabaret 2000! In the coming weeks I'll be giving you Cabaret Update dozens of CD reviews to help you choose the ones just right for you, but (Simulcast on WRTN-first, before we completely bid goodbye to 1999 and the last century, I'm FM/WVOX-AM) counting down the Top Twenty [20] Shows of last year - drum roll please! At number 20: Although technically not a cabaret act because it took place at a large theatre, this show was filled with cabaret style by a performer who knows how to put forth a lyric with heartfelt honesty and still blast out a belt to the back row. This lady is entertainment! Liza Minnelli at THE PALACE with MINNELLI ON MINNELLI begins our countdown.

Number 19: The CABARET CONVENTION is always the place to discover and reaffirm a cabaret lover's dreams, and this year was no exception; but beyond that, the ASCAP night and it's salute to new cabaret standards and those composers went to a place of rarefied air, of "pinch me I think I'm dreaming." This evening of picture-perfect performances and organic moments was a once in a lifetime of glorious serendipity.

Number 18 is the longest, funniest, most raucous show ever! This performer has the comic timing and musicality of Victor Borge, the quick spontaneity of Robin Williams, and the grace and charm of perfect host Johnny Carson all rolled into Mark Nadler, who's nonstop fun with special guests makes him the toast of Cabaret and Broadway at SARDI'S.

Number 17 is an actor with music. Every lyric is exposed for deeper meaning. Every humorous anecdote is communicated with expert timing. It's all packaged in a knock-out delivery in shows which are almost perfectly laid out. Barbara Brussell makes us love the art of cabaret.

Number 16 is an old pro in films, theatre, TV and concert stages and, as a newcomer to cabaret, was able to knock a home-run out of the park the very first time in her debut at the OAK ROOM. She brought her unique sense of humor, great anecdotes, super material, the added attraction of her ethnic heritage and the ability to take a risk with a capital "R" to make a fun-filled evening of pure delight. Rita Moreno at THE ALGONQUIN.

Number 15 surprised everyone with a an entertaining evening chock full of clever impersonations, dramatic and touching song interpretations and readings, and very funny stories. Add that to the fact it was all packaged in a perfectly paced show and presented by a man who reeks sex appeal no matter what his stage of life. Gene Barry also at THE ALGONQUIN.

Number 14 is the epitome of sleek sophistication and master of the intelligent witty remark. Capable of dead-on impersonations and comprehensive stories which she weaves throughout her presentations making it all appear seamless while serenading her audience with a sweet sound often delicate on the most moving ballads. Mary Cleere Haran did it again this year with "The Twenties" at THE ALGONQUIN.

At lucky 13 he plays piano like a dream and embodies those natty nightclub performers of yore. He makes it chic to be retro but this man is always fresh and original finding something new in classic cabaret fare. The exceptional Steve Ross' "Travels With My Piano" at THE FIREBIRD.

At number 12 she found just the right mix of composers and then displayed every double entendre she could find to entertain in a saucy, vibrant, and honest show which blended the naughty but innocent comedy with tear jerkers and upbeat numbers. KT Sullivan "Noel, Cole and Bart" at THE FIREBIRD.

Number 11 had this gentleman soaring with his pleasing baritone and warm smile, often grinning like the cat who caught the canary, sometimes dewy-eyed on romantic ballads the show slid along in a seemingly effortless manner as any great cabaret show should. Jack Donahue at THE FIREBIRD.

Number 10 has polished off over 25 shows in the past 15 years, each one more comprehensive and inventive than the one before. This year was ever more personal, dealing with material not often heard in cabaret and bringing the same warm inviting personality and quick sense of humor to a brand new yet completely familiar show. Andrea Marcovicci "Our Songs" at THE ALGONQUIN.

At Number 9, she has already taken the theatre world by storm and now it's cabaret with her funny, true, stories told like an old friend, she easily sets up her material to add that extra touch of magic singing with confidence and poise she filled the room with a sense of wonder and excitement. Faith Prince at JOE'S PUB and THE FIREBIRD.

At Number 8, he kicks into high gear with a new ease on stage, weaving tales through his lyrics which touch and amaze. He tells sweet stories and sings those up-tempo tunes with a wild side we were just waiting to see released. In '99 he was better than ever before. Tom Andersen at THE FIREBIRD.

Number 7 has this lady at the top of her game. Belt? No problem. Ease into a lyric and peel off layers one by one? Simple. Smile, laugh, make the whole audience feel like they're part of something truly special? She does it all with ease. Karen Mason at JOE'S PUB.

Number 6 never does anything less than riveting! Sometimes old favorites but new and daring material as well. She's sexy and charming, with a unique sound which always delivers. She makes every show is an adventure. Eartha Kitt at THE CARLYLE.

Number 5 is a perennial favorite. Every show is a professional, polished affair with impeccable arrangements from Wally Harper and a sound as sweet as honey. She's warm and loving in her room and always entertaining with ballads that touch your heart and humor which makes you smile. Barbara Cook, "Salute to Gower Champion" at THE CARLYLE.

Number 4 was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see legends in the business. A nightclub act from another era which was fresh and funny and brimming with vitality. And these lyric writing performers brought down the house! Thank goodness I can say, "I was there to see" Comden & Green at JOE'S PUB.

In the Number 3 slot is a guy who showed up quietly and ended up stopping the CABARET CONVENTION. He works from a place of artistic integrity, bringing forth a unique vision in cabaret. Performing material that was hardly traditional, he somehow wove a spell during his show and created one of those unforgettable moments in time. It sometimes seems like he's channeling some greater spirit. He's unlike anybody we've ever seen. Mark Coffin at JUDY'S.

Number 2 is another theatre performer. She put together a uniquely personal journey which was easily relate le to all who watched. It was one of those precious journeys we all hope to take in a cabaret club. Funny, sad, sweet, sentimental, upbeat, it moves along in perfect harmony and we became one with her. Sally Mayes at EIGHTY EIGHT'S and THE FIREBIRD.

And finally the Number One Show of 1999. He has become the quintessential cabaret performer for this generation. His natural exuberance is contagious, his sound pure and easy, and his knack for picking the right material with just the right arrangement and then performing it with the perfect mix of tenderness and excitement makes this the best act around. The ultimate blend of a perfect set of musicians matched with a cabaret singer to create one great big entertainment of the highest caliber. Michael Feinstein at THE REGENCY is the Number One Show of '99!

InTheater, September 6-13, 1999, by Barbara & Scott Siegel

Hotter than a stolen diamond, Mark Coffin is what you might call a "dangerous tenor." His edgy, audacious stage persona is supported by a distinctively beautiful voice that can as easily caress a lyric as bite into an emotion. This singer smolders; he's exciting to watch because you never know when he's going to ignite.

Coffin opened his Judy's show with Cy Coleman and Carolyn Leigh's "The Best Is Yet To Come", and the promise of that song's title was immediately fulfilled. Performing the works of composers as diverse as Dave Frishberg ("Slappin' The Cakes On Me"), Johnny Mercer ("Anyplace I Hang My Hat Is Home"), Tom Petty ("Room AT The Top"), and Amanda Mcbroom("Wheels"), the singer Coffinized them with his considerable acting chops, sly sense of humor, and fine musical skills.

Guiding Coffin through his program was Ross Patterson, the incomparable musical director/pianist. Between Patterson's inspired arrangements and Coffin's execution, much pleasure was to be had; the pair was happily joined by the excellent guitarist Matt Turk.

Backstage, Aug.20,1999 by John Hoglund

I'll get right to the point. Mark Coffin's recent series of shows at Judy's was extraordinary. Returning to cabaret after too long of an absence, he opened with a jazz-tinged arrangement of Cy Coleman's "The Best Is Yet To Come". The two-time Bistro-winner took us on a singing journey of obsession, angst, and disturbance, culminating in the joy of finding one's way after a rough period. All of this was conveyed by the songs he chose and performed with depth and conviction.

That conviction must have come from a personal voyage of discovery that clearly has led him to a better place in his life. While I don't know what demons he faced in the past, his act was brutally honest and true to himself. Entertaining his audience with this dark show peppered with amusing anecdotes, he gave them more than they might have expected. This folksy, expressive tenor has a wry sense of humor that is totally endearing.

For instance, singing an original song—"Eventually", written with Reed Parsley—Coffin says, "Love comes along every once in a while...it begins in my heart and it ends in your smile." In a haunting reading of Tom Lehrer's "The Old Dope Peddler", Coffin rivets the room, painting sullen images of shadows in the night. ("Here's the end to all my sorrows—the answer to all my distress.") Then he fuses "Peddler" with a teary reading of Thelonius Monk's intense "Round Midnight". Rarely have I seen a singer bring such vivid pain to a lyric. Through this brilliant journey of raw emotions, you know he's touched a dark place inside. You can feel his pain on "Ghost In This House", a Rod McKuen-style beauty written by Hugh Priestwood, that was an emotional wipeout. Coffin's beautiful timbre and tender phrasing shined on Amanda McBroom's "Wheels".

Yet it wasn't all grim. The singer's offbeat whimsy glowed on Dave Frishberg's sexy "Slappin' The Cakes On Me" and Jim Infantino's silly "Stress", about caffeine addiction. He showed restrained optimism on Ann Hampton Callaway's "At The Same Time", thereby closing one of the season's most powerful shows. Coffin's artistry is sharp, intelligent, and cutting edge. Most of all, he's just refreshingly honest. He was deftly accompanied by Ross Patterson at the piano and Matt Turk on guitar.