

rt hall, a cabaret singer can light up the night. Here are five who do just that

## Daryl Nitz

Daryl Nitz is a focal point of Chicago cabaret. Scarcely anything goes that he has no part of.

"He can whip these shows out," Moran said. "He's brilliant."

Known especially for his astonishingly apt vocal impersonations of such musical icons as Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Judy Garland and at least a score of others, the lanky blond singer projects a polished bass-baritone in his own persona as well as a vibrant, witty banter with audiences.

Every Friday and Saturday, he and pianist George Howe conduct a lively late-night piano-bar party called "The Nitz and Howe Experience" at Davenport's. The two will soon release a CD.

In between, Nitz organizes a host of other shows, coaches and directs other singers, serves as vice president of Chicago Cabaret Professionals, drops in at other performers' gigs, takes voice lessons and, incidentally, conducts a full-time career as an elementary-school teacher.

A native of Elgin who started out singing at Emmanuel Baptist Church, Nitz began his professional career about 16 years ago on the Spirit of Chicago cruise ship.

Among his upcoming shows, Nitz organized the four-part Chicago Cabaret Professionals spring series featuring more than 30 performers, beginning Sunday, and will direct and host four performances of a Judy Garland tribute April 20-23.



Daryl Nitz as Judy Garland



## Suzanne Petri

"She's so good!" Daly said. "She really knows how to sell a song."

The vivacious, smoky-voiced Suzanne Petri performs what she calls "Songs in the Key of Diva" about every two weeks in a Parisian-style cabaret in the basement of Cyrano's Bistrot, a French restaurant in River North, usually with her musical director, Bob Moreen, a pianist and vocalist.

Both will also appear in the Chicago Cabaret Professionals' spring series. Petri appears regularly at a variety of venues.

"I just love her smile," Daly said. "She's so attractive."

After several forays from her native Minneapolis, Petri came to Chicago for good in 1986.

"There's so much better cabaret here," she said. "Also theater."

An actress as well as a singer, Petri belongs to American Theater Company's ensemble and has also acted at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Apple Tree Theatre and others. She brings a strong theatricality to her cabaret performances, which comes across even in her CD "A Marvelous Party." Her rendition of Stephen Sondheim's "Ladies Who Lunch" is a showstopper.

"Suzy Petri is a great interpreter," Thacker said. "She has such style."

Her repertoire extends beyond the Great American Songbook to Kurt Weill, Jacques Brel and other Europeans. She also does a few impressions, singing in the style of Marlene Dietrich, Edith Piaf and others.

"Her Dietrich is exquisite," Thacker said.

**For cabaret performances and showtimes, see Page 38**

## MaryMonica Thomas

"The first word that comes to mind is 'lovely,'" Thacker said. "She's beautiful."

"She's a very sexy singer. She's smooth. I could sit and listen to her all day."

Approaching her 40th birthday, MaryMonica

Thomas is one of the younger cabaret artists in Chicago. About 10 years ago, she left a lifelong career as a dancer and chorister and made her first efforts to sing alone, appearing at open-mics around town, such as the one held by Menzie.

"I never considered myself as a singer," she said. "I had terrible stage fright. Beckie always encouraged me."

Today, she's hitting her stride. "Like opera singers, cabaret singers' voices mature and improve with experience," Thacker said.

Thomas appears on Mondays and Fridays at Tuscany in Oak Brook and sings with a dance band called Interlude and a harmony trio called 3 Girls 3, as well as running MaryMonica Music, a booking agency that represents a wide variety of local performers, including cabaret artists.



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