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Sarasota Herald-Tribune (FL)

Cabaret's Cole Porter revue sizzles with life

November 10, 2003

Section: FLORIDA WEST

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JAY HANDELMAN jay.handelman@heraldtribune.com

There are many moods to Cole Porter, and Florida Studio Theatre's Cabaret Club explores them in the bouncy revue "Too Darn Hot."

The show mixes familiar ballads, upbeat comic tunes and a touch of Parisian influence with a focus on some smoothly sung, jazzy arrangements. A strong cast of four has a grand time singing nearly three dozen songs, most of them arranged in a way that plays with the traditional rhythms and melodies, lending many of the songs a fresh sound.

Director and choreographer **Dennis Courtney** gives the show a sprightly pace, but he has a tendency to include unnecessary gestures that emphasize specific words without providing added texture.

At their best, generally in the second half, Courtney and his collaborators effectively group songs to tell stories, such as the way a kiss inflects the performances of "So in Love" and "It's All Right With Me."

The time Porter spent in Paris is reflected in "You Don't Know Paris" and "C'est Magnifique," which eventually lead a traveler to the joys of New York in "Take Me Back to Manhattan."

There are satirical pokes at wealthy socialites, from the humorously told "Tale of the Oyster" -- done as a fairy tale -- to the Noel Coward-esque "Thank You So Much, Missus Lowsborough-Goody."

The show marks the return of Jannie Jones, after her two-year run on Broadway in "The Full Monty." Her voice and personality remain vibrant as she shifts from a girlish "Let's Fall in Love" to the gospel-flavored "Blow, Gabriel, Blow." She struggles, however, on the romantic "So in Love."



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Jim Weaver and Stephen Hope also return, joined by newcomer Julie Cardia. Weaver is one of the most expressive performers to appear in the Cabaret Club shows, with his bright eyes and nimble fingers accentuating his lovely sounds. Hope does best with comical numbers edged with melancholy, such as "Just a Gigolo," although he also brings tenderness to "In the Still of the Night."

Cardia has a bright voice and range, playfully singing "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" and conveying a more mature touch for "Love for Sale."

The singers are well accompanied by pianist Jim Prosser, and musical director Michael Sebastian brings out the harmonies in many of the songs.

When the tunes come together to create new stories, the show sparkles by giving new life to some great selections from Porter's impressive catalogue.

THEATER REVIEW

Too Darn Hot

Words and music by Cole Porter. Directed and choreographed by **Dennis Courtney**. Reviewed Nov. 6. Through Jan. 10, 2004. Florida Studio Theatre Cabaret Club, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets are \$20, \$22. Call 366-9000.

Caption: COURTESY PHOTO / LEBLANC STUDIOS
Julie Cardia and Stephen Hope appear in the Florida Studio Theatre production of "Too Darn Hot."

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