

PORTRAIT

Scully Sessions

Patrick Scully's cabaret shows bring together truly uncommon minds.

It's girded by sound barriers and a concrete overpass outside, but Patrick's Cabaret, a small theater space tucked under the freeway in south Minneapolis, is actually homey inside. And that's as it should be, since the cabaret is the home of its founder and host, Patrick Scully, gay artist and activist, who perfectly complements his surroundings. At six feet, eight inches, with a scraggly, sandy beard, he is just the thing to go with the white walls and high ceilings of his loft. Like the brightly lit former mortuary itself, Scully is rangy, but not intimidating; elegant, but not icy. He's a paradigm of the gay aesthetic, but he also looks sort of like a big, rangy, beach bum.

Scully's appearance and manner are emblematic of his cabaret's agenda, on which community is as important as style. He's a long-

time, successful performing artist—his dance work has been trumpeted by *The New York Times* and *Village Voice*—but in terms of his cabaret, Scully seems more interested in good times than the big time: The entertainment on a typical evening includes work by men and women, gays and straights, professionals and amateurs. Because Scully does not audition his acts, the resulting programs reflect more of what there is to be found in the human village than they would if he put his aesthetic imprint on them. A recent Saturday evening featured a hilarious turkey-basting lesson from comic performer Joan Calof, an earnest poetry reading, a book-reading-and-song act that had the audience humming along, the usual icky therapeutic performance art, and new-age vocal improv by a trio of earth goddesses wearing thick socks

tucked into elfin boots.

What makes an evening at Patrick's enjoyable, and sometimes magical, is not only the diversity of the acts, but the general lack of attitude. It's a place that's warm without being fuzzy, where homemade hot chocolate is served from a bar twinkling with Christmas lights, and the humor is deadpan and droll, but never nastily ironic. If some of the acts are more polished than others or reflect a more "informed" sensibility, the end product is unaffected by those small discrepancies.

Finally, what you're left with are feelings of goofy celebration and indomitable well-being. Art may be fragile, but it's also hardy. It's this sensibility that Scully refers to when asked what's more important to him, community or aesthetics: "Community and aesthetics?" he says. "You can't separate the two." ■

By Emily Carter | Photograph by Bill Phelps

