

Digging the Underground
St. Stephens Cabaret has
something for everyone —
but you have to find it first
By Joan Timmis
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Gym by Day, Art by Night

Editor's note: St. Stephens' Cabaret will
take place on Sat. (10/11), 8 p.m., St.
Stephens School, 2123 Clinton Ave. S.,
Mpls.

By Joan Timmis

Emcee Patrick Scully admonished the audience again, "Please pull in your chairs, we need all the room we can get." The crowd settled down, an organ version of "Tico-Tico" came on and in rode a tall, thin man on a bicycle — a courier in red high-heels and pillbox hat. Performer David Lindahl circled the audience a few times at a nice clip, periodically lifting his legs away from the pedals for dramatic effect. Finishing his entrance, he ditched his bike, hopped up on stage and greeted the crowd with some hip swivels. "Welcome to Taboo and other poems."

This happening was part of the August edition of the on-going St. Stephen's Cabaret (two others were held this spring). And while an "inner-city" Catholic school gymnasium may not immediately call up a Berlin cabaret, Scully, who hosts and organizes the performances, "always had a dream of

being an impresario of a cabaret" even if the entertainment has to take place in a room fitted with basketball hoops and where the predominant color is mustard.

Scully, teaching dance to St. Stephen's students in exchange for the space, has transformed the room into something verging on a nightclub. He added a little mood lighting, flowers and candles on the long cafeteria tables and invited bakers, like Paul Hunziker, pastry chef at The New French Cafe, to sell sweets and coffee.

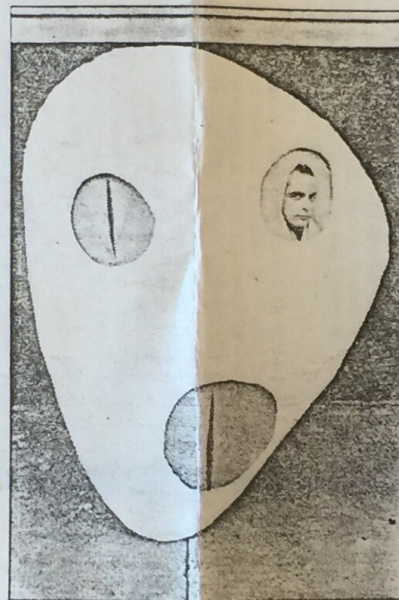
People don't show up just for the ambience. The steadily growing audiences, at this point, heavy on friends and family, pays \$3 to see the known and the unknown of the art fringe.

One of the knowns, Laurie Van Wieren (two-time participant), recently presented a piece, the working title of *Cello and Dance*, with cellist Michelle Kinney. The two artists, each completely swathed in blue flannel sheets and bound by ropes, explored the possibilities of performing under wraps in contrast to performing out of wraps. As these two struggled then triumphed, Tom Carlson and Barb Sobocinski chanted in the wings, "Nobody sings in heaven . . . I'm just a big bubble of love . . ." Van Wieren reports some audience members "couldn't believe Michelle was playing cello under that blanket."

Why does Van Wieren, winner of grants ("I'm just coming out of the Bush") and coming off a recent success at her Walker Art Center concert, want to perform on a stage with a gold lame backdrop and lighting and sound less than state-of-the-art? "I love performing with magicians," says Van Wieren referring

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Lindahl keeps an eye out.

to the eclectic line-up. "I like being around people who are excited about what they're doing. People are coming to this pretty fresh — but there is a problem, maybe it's just an easy laugh."

Another contributor, local fiction writer Susan Welch (*Paris Review*, Pushcart Press prize winner) is used to reading her work in formal settings that attract other writers. "When you do a reading you have a built-in fan club." But telling a story to an audience who doesn't know your work requires a different tack. "I choose the lively parts

of my novel. I try to be an actress and an entertainer. I put a spin on what I read. People are surprised to find out they like literary fiction."

The cabarets run the entertainment gamut. The August show included comedian/law student Cynthia Long, Catholic childhood writer and storyteller Sue Halloran, "imaginist" Kurt Scott and dancer/karate enthusiast Erika Thorne.

The "most inscrutable event of the evening" went to Andy Roble's *Pesky Thoughts*. Dressed like a cowboy, Roble cranked his big homemade scroll TV set so that a paper roll of cow drawings and titles such as "Cow Myths," "Impressed Cow," "Cow Fears," etc., passed through the frame.

Scully claims he's "not interested in auditioning and quality control," and usually found this wide range of talent by calling up his friends. "I had some things I wanted to perform and I knew others that had something to show. I got on the phone and called people. They were glad to have the opportunity to perform without having to produce it themselves." In a town where some critics say production values are often stressed over content, Scully's cabaret is a haven for artists who just want to try things out on friendly spectators.

Scully's venture "operates on a grass roots level," particularly the publicity. To find out the cabaret dates, the potential concertgoer has to either hear about it through the grapevine or appear on Scully's mailing list. The best way way to get on that list, of course, is to show up at St. Stephen's School on cabaret nights. ■