

## Rave Reviews for "O'Connor and Vogel"



### THE SIEGELS' NIGHTLIFE NOTES

#### You Great, Big, Beautiful Guy & Doll

By: Barbara & Scott Siegel

Cabaret and musical theater are closer than kissing cousins, as proven by Guy & Doll, currently playing at Don't Tell Mama. This elegantly crafted show stars two musical theater character actors, Brian Tom O'Connor as The Guy and Debra Vogel as The Doll. It's an act with a sharply defined musical comedy sensibility that takes the audience through the cycle of romantic relationships.



Brian Tom O'Connor and Debra Vogel

One of Guy & Doll's most inspired groupings begins with "Take a Job" (Styne/Comden & Green) from Do-Re-Mi, in which a shrewish Vogel insists that her lollygaging husband, O'Connor, give up his pipe dreams of success and go to work for her father. The two stars are funny, touching, and totally in character. Then comes the first payoff, as O'Connor follows up with a poignant "The Man I Used to Be" (by Rodgers & Hammerstein, from Pipe Dream). And still the story continues as Vogel comically comments, "I Wanted to Change Him" (Styne/Comden & Green again, from Hallelujah, Baby!). Finally, for dessert, O'Connor & Vogel duet on "Cherry Pies Ought to be You" (Cole Porter, from Out of This World). That last song, rarely performed in cabaret -- largely because most cabaret acts are solo affairs -- is sensational, and Vogel and O'Connor do it extremely well.

Coming from another cabaret act that ran late, we arrived at Guy & Doll during the show's second number. Nonetheless, we quickly discovered that not all of the set-ups and songs were derived from famous musicals; for instance, in a dating scene set in a restaurant, O'Connor sings of his love of "Frim Fram Sauce" (Joe Ricardel/Redd Evans). We have not come across a more inspired use of that comic nonsense song, originally made famous by the Nat King Cole Trio.

Vogel is at her best when she's playing a lowbrow character; she can put on an amusing Brooklyn accent or act the tough broad with comic panache. O'Connor is a versatile and winning character actor, as poignant as he is funny, and he really knows how to milk a gag.

The musical director of the show is Darryl Curry, the director is Elfin Frederick; both deserve credit for helping to arrange the music and fine-tune the structure of this endearing and enjoyable musical comedy cabaret.



## Guy and Doll: Can Do

by [Michael Dale](#)

Brian Tom O'Connor and Debra Vogel are probably not the type of performers you have in mind when you first think of the New York cabaret scene, but their show *Guy and Doll*, making a return engagement to Don't Tell Mama, is not your typical cabaret evening.

In reviewing their last New York outing, *How to Be Perfect*, I described their chemistry as reminiscent of what you might have found in a 1960's television special starring Jackie Gleason and Nancy Walker, but this time their work, though still **raucously funny**, is tinged with a few subtler shades. Director Elfin Frederick has truly helped shape them into **a musical comedy version of Mike Nichols and Elaine May**. They are sketch comics who use showtunes for punch lines in playing out **charming and funny** vignettes of male/female romantic relationships. Working without amplification, the two of them have solid musical comedy character actor voices -- his a light baritone and hers a sassy belt -- and are staged as though we're watching scenes from a book musical. (Musical staging is by Nora Brown.)



"It all starts with seduction", the pair reminds us as they begin with "Seduction in three cities: London, Venice and (Irving) Berlin." The trio begins with Michael Flanders and Donald Swann's "Have Some Madeira, M'Dear", a rarely heard gem from their revue *At The Drop Of A Hat*. "Thinking", by Rodgers and Sondheim, is used to demonstrate the awkwardness of asking for that first date and, in an inspired set-up, Irving Berlin's "You're Just In Love" is played out in the office of a lecherous psychiatrist.

In another fun combination, a dinner date is set to the tunes of "Frim Fram Sauce" (Redd Evans and Joe

Ricardel), "Honeysuckle Rose" (Fats Waller and Andy Razaf) and "Squeeze Me" (Waller and Spencer Williams).

More poignant moments are done effectively with "Saturday Night is the Loneliest Night of the Week" (Styne and Cahn), "I Wanted to Change Him" (Styne, Comden and Green) and "And What If We Had Loved Like That" (Maltby and Shire), but there's always a **funny** duet on the horizon like "Cherry Pies Ought to Be You" (Porter) or "Take a Job" (Styne, Comden and Green). An especially **clever** bit involves Adler and Ross' "I'll Never Be Jealous Again" performed as part of a medical study on human behavior involving Barbie and Ken Dolls.

Darryl Curry is not only the music director and accompanist, but he's also a welcome participant in both vocals and hi-jinks.

One of the things that makes O'Connor and Vogel **so enjoyable** is that their shows are **completely family friendly**, without any overtly sexual or controversial material, and **yet there is no lack of adult sophistication**. *Guy and Doll* is the kind of show you can take your conservative out-of-town relatives to, but it's also **a terrific pick for date night**.

**Photos by Josh Yu**



## CABARET/REVIEW

GUY & DOLL

Don't Tell Mama, 343 W. 46th Street

# Rubdown with a Velvet Glove

## Love in the time of marriage

By CHRISTOPHER BYRNE

In a cynical world, the new cabaret revue Guy and Doll, at Don't Tell Mama, is an absolutely refreshing, gentle and thoroughly delightful diversion that pairs the warm and talented Debra Vogel and Brian Tom O'Connor in a series of vignettes about the trials and tribulations of seeking love, dating, and marriage.

Now, I know that sounds like any number of cabaret shows making the rounds on any given evening, but Ms. Vogel and Mr. O'Connor are so charming by themselves and have such a buoyant chemistry between them that what might seem hackneyed is warm and at times uproariously funny. Ms. Vogel in particular is a sly and knowing comedienne who can also deliver a richly heartfelt ballad. Mr. O'Connor has the wry perspective of one who has been around the block a few times but is always willing to give it one more go. Together, particularly when butting heads or matching wits, they generate the same kind of lighthearted electricity that made the screwball comedies of the 1930s work. There is the sense that this is all in good fun, and director Elfin Frederick makes the most of that.

The gimmick of the show is that each of the songs the couple sing is presented as a scene between a man and woman at one stage of their relationship, and over the course of the brief evening, we see couples who can't stop thinking of how nice it would be to know each other a little more intimately and couples who can't stop thinking that their partner is about as appetizing as pickled snake.

Though this may seem a bit obvious, it works in Guy & Doll because the performers have chosen some unusual numbers, including "Cherry Pies Ought to Be You" by Cole Porter, "I'll Never be Jealous Again" by Adler and Ross and "Have Some Madeira M'Dear." For those of us who grew up listening to the records of Out of this World, The Pajama Game and At the Drop of a Hat, it's lovely not merely to hear these songs again but to see them performed with some sort of context. And it works, even if seemingly farfetched. Though "You're Just in Love" from Call Me Madam, does not take place in a psychiatrist's office in the show, the setting that Ms. Vogel and Mr. O'Connor have created is quite funny and serves the purposes of their show. There are also a delightful Fats Waller medley and a quite moving rendition of "The Man I Used to Be" by Mr. O'Connor. The songs have been chosen with care and under the music direction of Darryl Curry finds a perfect mix between comedy and musicality.

Guy & Doll has such simplicity and good fun and feels so present and honest, it seems like the perfect antidote to the cold and mechanized entertainment of such abominations as American Idol or even Survivor. That kind of entertainment holds no appeal to me. I'll spend my time and money any day watching two charming people singing their hearts out and really exploring the emotional range of a song. Guy & Doll delivers just that and more. It's a fine, fun evening

# STU HAMSTRA'S Cabaret Hotline ONLINE

CABARET HOTLINE ONLINE #021002

GUY & DOLL, a cabaret-theater revue starring musical comedy duo Debra Vogel and Brian Tom O'Connor, continues its **triumphant return** to DON'T TELL MAMA

I saw this show a few weeks back - the **chemistry** between these two show-business veterans shines through every line. It's **a chuckle a minute, with lots of side-splitters sprinkled in** - all done with aplomb.



*Brian Tom O'Connor & Debra Vogel*

*"How to be Perfect"*

Troubled by the state of the world? Disgruntled over election results? Wondering how soon they'll ship your job to a third-world country? Here's a temporary but effective way to pull your spirits up: head for Don't Tell Mama to catch Brian Tom O'Connor and Debra Vogel's musical comedy cabaret show, *How to be Perfect*. With a whimsical slant on everything they touch on and sing about -- from love to cell phones, Palm Pilots and back again -- **it will take special effort to not be uplifted, delighted and impressed with the comedic and showbiz savvy of these two performers.**

They've got a cleverly-selected songbook that moves the show along on overdrive, **chock full of grade-A material** from Porter to Mercer and equally enjoyable tunes from lesser-known songsmiths. The rendition of Jonathan Larson's *Therapy* from *tick, tick, Boom!* is an especial treat. The entire show, by the way, is performed sans microphones, a perfect match to the intimacy of the room.

Credit also to Musical Director Darryl Curry and Director Elfin Frederick. Nora Brown's musical staging polished the apple, while tech director Bobby Kneeland added just the right touch to the lighting. Most of all, **O'Connor and Vogel are naturals, an ingratiating antidote to letting reality get you down.**

*How to be Perfect* plays again at Don't Tell Mama on Tuesday, November 30th, and Monday, December 6th. Go!

**Peter Leavy**  
Cabaret Scenes



## How To Be Perfect: Relationship Advice From Lesser Known Showtunes

by Michael Dale

As soon as I glanced over the song list for their cabaret show, *How To Be Perfect*, I knew Brian Tom O'Connor and Debra Vogel were **my kinda people**. With more than half their selections coming from flop or otherwise obscure musicals such as *Tovarich*, *So Long*, *174th Street* and *Dance a Little Closer*, I took my first sips of vodka martini anticipating a welcome evening with seldom-heard friends.

O'Connor and Vogel are not the type of performers you normally have in mind when you think of New York cabaret. They're musical comedy character actors; a tall, husky, sweet-faced fellow with a light baritone and a graceful stride paired with a brash, curvy belter with that funny outer-boroughs ethnic charm. **Picture a 1960's television special starring Jackie Gleason and Nancy Walker and you'll get an idea of the dynamic between these two talented clowns and the style of show they present.**

*How To Be Perfect* spoofs self-help gurus who preach the dos and don'ts of successful relationships. From the pangs of love at first sight (Lee Pockriss and Anne Crosswell's "Uh-Oh!"), to awkward first phone calls with prospective internet dates (Stan Daniels' "It's Like"), to the importance of mutual communication (Jonathan Larson's "Therapy"), the duo uses theatre songs (sans microphones, by the way) as examples of the pitfalls and pleasures of romance.

The tone of their humor (co-authored with director Elfin Frederick) is, and I don't mean this in a bad way, exceedingly cute. This isn't a show built on the scathing wit of jaded and jilted urban sophisticates. No, the jokes are gentle, clean and delivered with **an appealing sense of good-natured fun**.

Highlights include O'Connor as a sleazy pick-up artist winking his way through Charles Strouse and Lee Adam's "The Woman For The Man" and a **rousingly funny** rendition of Stan Daniel's "You", a song that combines every standard love song title imaginable. ("You were meant for me / Just tea for two and two for tea / You're the cream in my coffee / You are my lucky star / The dearest things I know are what you are") But the two are at their best when **they get to show off their acting chops** in the Tom Jones/Harvey Schmidt musical scene "Nobody's Perfect" from *I Do! I Do!*. This extended sequence, originally performed by the likes of Mary Martin and Robert Preston, is now given a fresh, lowbrow spin.

**But the main point of *How To Be Perfect* is to deliver the laughs, and that's what O'Connor and Vogel do best. They're a lovable pair of old-style musical comedy comics with excellent taste in lesser known showtunes.**

# STU HAMSTRA'S Cabaret Hotline ONLINE

By Stu Hamstra

I was back at DON'T TELL MAMA for Brian Tom O'Connor and Debra Vogel's musical comedy revue "How To Be Perfect." I saw and enjoyed their previous cabaret show, "Guy & Doll," and was even more entertained by this one. With a bunch of medleys by musical director Darryl Curry and some clever musical staging by Nora Brown, the show is filled with songs and stories (and a little dancing) that explains just what it takes to be perfect - especially in matters of the heart.

Director Elfin Frederick wisely has the pair keeping their own personalities, rather than have them act out character roles. The songs are terrific - this is the type of revue that in the old days would have the songwriters from Tin Pan Alley sending in submissions. **True fun from beginning to end**, the show continues at MAMA'S on Sunday, November 14th at 5:30 pm and Tuesdays, November 16th & 30th at 9:00 pm and November 23rd at 6:30 pm.



of Wit



and Romance

Photo by Josh Yu

## The Intelligencer.

"Some of the issues sound like it's this serious therapeutic kind of show," says Debra Vogel, here with Brian Tom O'Connor, "but it's so much fun with all these universal experiences people find themselves in. It's kind of like life: One minute, you're laughing; the next, you feel like your heart is in your stomach and you just got kicked but then the next minute, you're back up again."

**It's a musical blend that, delivered by the dynamic duo of O'Connor & Vogel, is sure to have you in stitches.**

**F**or those who plan to catch the duo of O'Connor & Vogel at Odette's this weekend, keep in mind this caveat:

There are moments that actually may make you cringe. Times when you will

### SOUND STAGE

Naila Francis



squirm with embarrassment, perhaps even discomfort. You might find yourself moved to tears, and if you happen to bring a date, eyeing your partner with renewed interest that speaks either to greater fondness or a sudden desire to flee.

But take heed of this advice, too:

**You will laugh — uproariously. And as this pair of musical comedy character actors dispenses their madcap blend of wit and talent, any distress you feel is likely to be fleeting, dissolved almost as instantly as it appears in a fit of side-splitting laughter.**

Part of what makes the performances by Brian Tom O'Connor and Debra Vogel **so appealing**, you see, is their ability to bring our foibles and follies in romantic relationships to light in a way that invites humorous self-examination.

"A lot of times, cabarets can be very

### IF YOU GO

**Who:** O'Connor & Vogel in "Guy and Doll" and "How To Be Perfect"

**Where:** Odette's, 274 S. River Road, New Hope

**When:** "Guy and Doll" at 8 p.m. Friday;

"How To Be Perfect" at 8 p.m.

Saturday

**Information:** [www.oconnor-and-vogel.com](http://www.oconnor-and-vogel.com)

autobiographical where the performer talks about his or her own life or describes different things they've gone through," says Vogel. "I don't know if we said this or if someone else said this to us, but in cabaret, you learn about the performer. What makes our show different is that (audiences) also learn about themselves but in a funny, lighthearted way."

As the acclaimed New York performers bring their two smash revues, "Guy and Doll" and "How to be Perfect," to New Hope this weekend, some may be scratching their heads at their having found a place in cabaret. An O'Connor & Vogel show is crafted as a series of scenes between two characters, each delving into a particular aspect of romantic love, of course with just the right song — duets selected from the

treasure trove of famous and not-so-famous musicals — to punctuate the emotions being explored.

"We love, love, love the music, but we approach each scene as actors. For instance, the first song in 'Guy and Doll,' takes place in Edwardian London and it's some lecherous old man and young 17-year-old girl that he introduces to red wine and... other things," says Vogel, of the droll Michael Flanders and Donald Swann gem, "Have Some Madeira, M'Dear."

From there, it's a **charming and raucous** unraveling of the relationship journey, from those awkward first moments of dating to the sweetness of seduction and then the ensuing disbelief that awaits the smitten when they're forced to remove their rose-colored glasses. Yet while O'Connor & Vogel linger over love's travails in a series of sketches about marriage, with tunes such as "Take a Job" from "Do Re Mi" and "The Man I Used to Be" from "Pipe Dream," they remain optimistic. The closing numbers ride a high note from disillusionment to reconciliation with among the more clever numbers, a bit involving Barbie and Ken dolls set to "The Pajama Game's" "I'll Never Be Jealous Again."

"It's all the issues in relationships that people recognize but we approach most of them in a very funny way so that while people are recognizing these problems or these things that they confront, they're laughing at us and laughing at themselves also," says Vogel.

"And at the same time, they're getting an earful of some really great songs," adds O'Connor. "The first step is finding the songs, classic O'Connor & Vogel songs that have a great melody, wonderful lyrics and a relationship already implied."

"How to Be Perfect," which lampoons the self-help tenets of successful relationships, opens, for instance, with "Economics," by Kurt Weill and Alan Jay Lerner, in a scene with a couple clashing over finances.

"Brian is the romantic and I'm more the pragmatist," says Vogel. "I think we need to be financially solvent in order to be perfect."

"I think we can just live on love and don't need any money," says O'Connor. "That whole idea of how one side of a relationship wants to change the other, wants the other to be perfect and better – that theme runs through both shows."

And so there are characters like the woman who finds that her new and improved love is actually less preferable than the man she wanted to change; the couple whose communication skills, honed through months of therapy, desert them when they need it the most; and the husband whose bright idea of making a list of each other's flaws with the aim of self-improvement rapidly blows up in his face.

It's farcical comedy that has called to mind the likes of Jackie Gleason and Nancy Walker and the boisterous hilarity of their 1960's television specials. And indeed the duo's director, Elfin Frederick, has steered them toward the deadpan dialogue and flawless improvisations of one of America's pioneering comedic duos, Mike Nichols and Elaine May, whose high-energy satirical sketches were among the most popular on radio, stage and television during the 1950s and early '60s.

"That was one of the nicest things anyone has ever said about us, comparing us to the screwball



Photo by Akiko Shioi

**"It's like the classic romantic comedies,"** says Brian Tom O'Connor of the revues he performs with Debra Vogel. "The audience, they get to like these two people but they know these two people are having some real conflicts and they're not getting together. You see them fight, but when they come together at the end, it's very satisfying.

comedies," says Vogel. "Some people might be insulted, but not us."

With such heavy satire and tongue-in-cheek humor, it can be a challenge to keep in character while also allowing audiences to glimpse the true personalities of the performers and their connection to the songs, one of the hallmarks of cabaret.

"When we first started, there was a pretty strong fourth wall that we put up, and gradually we found that we poked holes in the fourth wall and really talked to the audience," says O'Connor. "And then we added the character sketches and put the wall back, but at that point, we'd already introduced ourselves to the audience and let them get to know us. It actually took a while of trial and error to achieve that balance."

The two, who both have backgrounds in theater, have been working together for more than four years, hatching the idea for their mix of comedy and music when a friend asked them to come up with a scene to perform at a party. They had so much fun creating their character sketch, they performed again at the same party the

following year and pretty soon had developed their signature brand of miniature musical comedies.

"We have different ways of working but respect each other's way," says Vogel, of why they work so well together. "Brian is more organized in his brain and more cerebral. He works everything out, which is wonderful to watch, because he works it all out and then it's still completely spontaneous. I think I tend to be a little more by the seat of my pants in the rehearsal process."

"All I know," says O'Connor, "is that I find Debra so darned entertaining."

It's a combination that ultimately proves exhilarating.

"We like our audience, we want them to feel good," says O'Connor. "This is not about us teaching them to be better people. It's about us getting them to have a good time, and discovering that even with conflict, which is part of every relationship, it's still better than loneliness. It's still better to have fought and made up than to have not been engaged with another human being at all."