

TALENT REVIEW

ASCAP Cabaret Songwriters Showcase V

By Robert Adels

ROSE GARDEN PERFORMANCE CENTER, WEST HOLLYWOOD, CA—If you think Jerry Herman—composer-lyricist of *Hello Dolly* and *Mame* fame—is a tough act to follow, you ought to catch Steve Lutvak in action.

"Steve who?" While Lutvak's musical scores have so far only been heard in regional theater productions, his cabaret act is ready to take on the world. Closing for Broadway vet Herman on a unique ASCAP-produced bill, newcomer Lutvak received a standing ovation from a celebrity-studded audience that included singer Rosemary Clooney, composer Henry Mancini, cabaret diva Andrea Marcovicci, and a host of Broadway stage names including Paul Dooley and Karen Morrow.

Lutvak's music blends the psychological depth of a Julia Fordham, the off-the-wall wit of a Michael Franks and the tuneful immediacy of a Neil Sedaka. His songs are chapters of a remarkably told autobiography that resonate with universal and undeniable impact.

In "Man Of Words," he details the joy of love at first sight and the sorrow of being tongue-tied to the scene. In "Mrs. Whitney," Lutvak reveals that he's become the kind of person his first piano teacher, and all of our own early authority figures, used to warn us about. In "Beware The Anger Of Soft-Spoken Men," Steve pops the corks off of so many bottled-up emotions that even Freud would have lost count.

Steve's solo pianowork far exceeded the cabaret standard, and his pre-recorded tracks for "Beware" show him to be as strong a producer/arranger as he is a performer/writer. Lutvak's L.A. debut had all the earmarks of Elton John's legendary Troubadour bow.

If this edition of ASCAP's public showcase for budding cabaret writers is any indication, producer Michael Kerker really knows how to put a show together. His special guest, Jerry Herman, added supreme historical balance to an evening otherwise devoted to the new.

Herman (together with his favorite backer's audition partner, Carol Dorian) presented exuberant, first-hand versions of his Broadway-gone-cabaret hits: "If He Walked Into My Life" (from the gold Sony cast album *Mame*, "I Am What I Am" (from RCA's *Le Cage Aux Folles*) and "Before The Parade Passes By" (from RCA's #1 *Hello Dolly*). But Jerry's opener was a true surprise, one of his earliest comic review songs which originally introduced Charles Nelson Reilly to New York audiences ("Confession To A Park Avenue Mother").

The first half of this ASCAP songwriter's showcase introduced the works of other impressive cabaret tunesmiths: Larry Kerchner (whose material runs from love duets like "Still Friends" to comic rhyme revelries like "What's Your Phobia?"); Portia Nelson (a Julius Monk review vet who now writes youthfully positive female anthems like "This Life"); and the team of Lindy Robbins and Gerald Sternbach (whose "Flying In Your Dreams," written for the current Ringling Brothers Circus show, was ebulliently sung by its ringmaster Eric Michael Gillett).

The evening was graciously and masterfully hosted by Broadway (*Sound Of Music*) and TV (*Too Close For Comfort*) star Nancy Dussault, whose comic ad libs rivaled her commanding vocal style.

The Rose Garden Performance Center proved the perfect spot for the entire affair. Under the creative direction of owner/entertainer Linda Gerard, this mini-complex of nightclub venues is making its mark by regularly bringing Big Apple-quality cabaret to the Big Orange.

TALENT REVIEW

They Might Be Giants

By Hilarie Grey

THE WILTERN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CA—In many ways the Brooklyn duo They Might Be Giants (Elektra) is the musical equivalent of a Gary Larson "Far Side" cartoon—their songs take a skewed, often outrageous look at the human condition and the ironies of the scientific world with a zaniness grounded in intelligence. Their performance was sincere, joyful and never condescending, letting the bouncing audience in on the joke every time.

Resembling the clean-cut, super-smart wisecrackers from everyone's science class, John Linnell (accordion, vocals, sax) and John Flansburgh (guitar, vocals, trumpet) romped with an excellent backing band through hilariously inventive arrangements which touched on a full spectrum of styles. "Dig My Grave" turned into a distortion guitar playout, while "She's Actual Size" and "If I Wasn't Shy" were sparse and downright jazzy. One of the show's greatest moments was an extended polka jam—you could almost see steam rising from Linnell's fingers as he worked out on the rock 'n' roll accordion.

The Giants brought down the house with catchy signature tunes like "Don't Let's Start," "Birdhouse In Your Soul" and "Istanbul (Not Constantinople)" as well as new entries from their latest release, *Apollo 18*, including "1 Palindrome I" and "My Evil Twin" ("He even has a squid like me," sang Flansburgh). They

took suggestions from the audience during a "stump the band" segment that resulted in a great treatment of "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling."

Tonight Show trumpeter Sal Marquez and folkie vocalist Syd Straw dropped by to contribute to the madness—most notably on "The Guitar," which incorporated an off-the-wall take on "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" into its refrain, and tapped the skills of Marquez and sax player Kurt Hoffman (who also handled keyboard duties) for a sizzling brass jam. Marquez' bright accents also added punch to the creepy mood of "Whistling In The Dark."

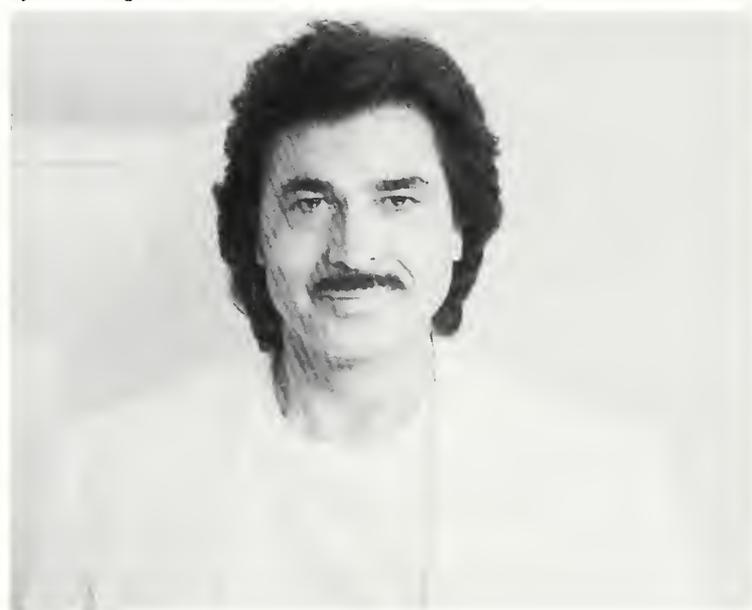
It would be tough to find an audience whose unhinged enthusiasm matched that of the crowd on hand at The Wiltern that night. They danced in the aisles, did the wave in the balcony, whooped at Flansburgh's guitar antics and two-fisted double-trumpet play, and most impressively, could recite every word of the Giants' tongue-twisting tunes. Like the Everly Brothers on speed, the two Johns provided them with a good-natured, though manic set that was obviously savored by all.



TALENT REVIEW

Engelbert Humperdinck

By Nina Tregub



THE GREEK THEATRE, HOLLYWOOD, CA—It's hard to believe that it has been 25 years since the good-looking singer with the funny name had his first big hit with "Release Me." But Engelbert Humperdinck, often referred to as the "King of Romance," is currently celebrating just that with a Silver Anniversary Tour and made a stop at the Greek Theatre while in L.A. In those 25 years, the silver-throated crooner has garnered 10 Grammys, a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and 15 platinum albums.

Many of Engelbert's big hits of the past are still a big part of his show: "After The Lovin'," "The Last Waltz" and "A Man Without Love," among others. However, the singer also included some new tunes, "Step Into My Life" and "I Get Lonely" from his latest PolyGram lp, *Love Is The Reason*.

Engelbert also displayed a comical side with his dead-on impersonations of Jerry Lewis, Sammy Davis, Jr. and his old buddy, Tom Jones. Although a misty rain fell throughout the evening, it was not enough to dampen the spirits of the audience or Engelbert himself. A truly enchanted evening!