

Crooning by candlelight

Cabaret Nights makes an encore in Vail at The Marketplace on Meadow Drive

By Sarah Mausolf
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VAIL — Cabaret is back. The Marketplace on Meadow Drive tested the appeal of the American songbook this summer when it hired eight servers to sing Broadway tunes.

What began as an experiment has turned into an extended ode to crooning by candlelight.

Cabaret Nights is now a permanent fixture at the Vail bistro. The winter cabaret season started last week and will run on weekends through the end of the ski season.

"With this economy, people want to be entertained," said music director Rayla Kundolf, a local art gallery director. "And there's nothing like a good musical, is there? You walk away whistling, tapping — or you see the youth or a mother who's showing her kid, 'I can do this.'"

This winter, patrons will find a more polished version of the summer cabaret. Group numbers, fresh cast members and a veteran pianist are new this season. Organizers also added a 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. show to cater to the apres ski crowd.

"The early show we think is going to attract a lot of families," Marketplace owner Bob McNichols said. "And because it's good, wholesome Broadway musical entertainment, it's going to be attractive to families who want to bring their kids in, and the kids will see somebody performing live right in front of them."

Singing in unison

Eight waiters and waitresses burst into a chorus of "Seasons of Love" from "Rent" on a recent Sunday evening.

Sitting at a table in the audience, Lakewood resident Lynn Tumey closed her eyes and mouthed the words. It was an emotional moment for Tumey, 49, who said the tune reminds her of a friend who passed away.

"I just think that's a fabulous song," she said, wiping tears from her eyes. "I love it."

Group numbers are a new addition to Cabaret Nights. They will likely become a staple of the shows. Kundolf envisions introducing these nights in the future.

"As we evolve, we're going to have a night of 'Chorus Line' or a night of nothing but 'Guys and Dolls,' or a night of 'Avenue Q,' so everybody has to learn all the songs," she said. "It will be like a reprise of a whole musical. That's the goal we're trying to get to. Right now, we're just introducing the group numbers."

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Vail resident Valentine Canja, 26, performs Frank Sinatra's "L-O-V-E" during a performance of Vail Cabaret Nights at The Marketplace on Sunday. Canja hails from Romania, where he attended a music arts school and performed in two bands.



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i If you go ...

What: Cabaret Nights.

When: From 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. and 8 to 10 p.m., Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through the end of the ski season; Every night from Dec. 19 through Jan. 4.

Where: The Marketplace on Meadow Drive, One Willow Bridge Road, Vail.

Cost: No cover charge.

More information: Call The Marketplace at 970-477-4370.



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Singing waiters and waitresses perform "Seasons of Love" from the musical "Rent" at The Marketplace on Sunday.

Local talent

Seventeen-year-old Sage Buchalter considers why she auditioned for Cabaret Nights as she spreads a black cloth over one of the tables.

"It's kind of the dream job," she said. "You get to make money, but you also get the performance experience."

For drama types, the cabaret show has been welcome practice for upcoming school musicals. Servers Buchalter, 15-year-old Kate Manley and 16-year-old Gina Lovell plan to compete for the role of Rizzo in Battle Mountain's spring production of "Grease."

Meanwhile, 17-year-old Miles Gordon hopes cabaret will give him "the courage to stand up and belt it" during auditions for Vail Mountain School's musical, he said.

The winter cast includes 17 servers, more than twice the number of singers who participated in the summer. The Marketplace continues to search for a full-time accompanist. Kundolf's husband, Taylor Kundolf, 45, has been filling in on the piano. He has played piano on a Norwegian Cruise Line and in several Vail Valley eateries.

Singing waitress Noel Lyons, 37, said the Marketplace has become a gathering place for the musically inclined.

"All of the talent has come out of the valley, and it's really become a meeting ground for families whose kids are in school and performing, to come here and enjoy them in an atmosphere that is more interactive," she said.

'I LOVE IT, IT'S NOT KARAOKE. THESE PEOPLE ACTUALLY HAVE TALENT, AND I REALLY ENJOY THAT.'

Lynn Tumey
Lakewood resident

While auditions coaxed out student talent, they also drew adults. Eagle resident Debbie Taagen, 43, said she wanted to find her "inner Broadway character."

Taagen sang in rock 'n' roll bands prior to having children and now runs a business teaching music to kids.

"I sing, but I'm always singing 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,'" she said with a laugh. "And you know, I kind of wanted to broaden my horizons, so to speak."

As Taagen sang "I Don't Know How to Love Him," from "Jesus Christ Superstar," a trio of women, including Tumey, shared a grilled artichoke at a nearby table.

Tumey said she saw Cabaret Nights on a chalkboard listing things to do at the Avon condo where she had been staying.

"I love it," she said. "It's not karaoke. These people actually have talent, and I really enjoy that. I really enjoy the venue because the Marketplace is a taste of France."

High Life Writer Sarah Mausolf can be reached at 970-748-2938 or smausolf@vaildaily.com.

The cast

Sage Buchalter
Kate Manley
Gina Lovell
Miles Gordon
Valentine Canja
Deb Taagen
Amy McCoy
Molly Brooks
Sage Smith
Noel Lyon
Meghan Jacobs
Galen Jacobs
Fred Pippien
Jason Steinberg
Charlie Barry