

**Review: *Sweet and Hot: The Songs of Harold Arlen*
By Alan Bresloff
Sun, 6/20/10**

Rogers Park has become one of the theater "hot spots" in Chicago and one of these theater troupes, Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre, keeps serving up some of the best of the best in musical productions. This small but vibrant troupe of performers, who can sing and dance up a storm, are also solid actors and, over the last two years, have been awarded a number of Non-Equity Jeff Awards for their excellence. Most of what they do are book shows- "Evita," "Chess," "Man Of LaMancha" and "Cabaret" to name a few, but their current production is a musical revue, "Sweet and Hot: The songs of Harold Arlen."

The name Harold Arlen may not mean anything to younger audiences, but some of the songs will be familiar--songs like "Over The Rainbow," "Blues in The Night," "Stormy Weather," "When The Sun Comes Out," "Get Happy," "It's Only A Paper Moon" and of course all of the music in "The Wizard of Oz" and much, much more! In fact, over 35 musical numbers that Arlen wrote with lyrics by greats, Johnny Mercer, Ted Koehler Billy Rose, Ira Gershwin, and E.Y. Harburg to name a few. All of this comes to life in the little storefront theater, known as The No Exit Cafe located at 6970 N. Glenwood Ave. (Rogers Park's Theater District makes Glenwood the shining light of the neighborhood). This is a small, very intimate cabaret setting that has been doing wonderful work under the leadership of Fred Anzevino. The No Exit seats about 50 or 60 people, depending on the stage set up, at tables for two, four and eight with the performers also being the servers as well as performing,

The talent that is assembled at Theo Ubique for its productions is one of high quality, and this show is no exception. The six performers are singers who can dance and act as they bring these wonderful songs to life. Director Anzevino has taken a new look at "Cabaret" as he takes us back in time, to those days of yesterday, where night spots were glorious bars with some food and entertainment. The music was romantic and soulful dealing with lost loves, new loves, old memories and a few comic songs just to make one smile. No Exit is the perfect venue for a show like this with a small stage (with a dance floor added) and an additional stage added to the north side of the building. A single piano provides the music played by musical director Steve Carson, who also takes on a solo number of his own. The choreography by David Heimann is solid, utilizing the small space to perfection.

The music is what we came for and the songs are given their vibrancy and power by the six performers that grace the stage--three men: Kristofer Simmons who started off a little stiff with the romantic numbers but truly showed his stuff when it came to the comedy numbers, such as "Lydia The Tattooed Lady" done as well as Groucho Marx himself, Eric Martin, the leading man type who has all the right moves and does a great "Let's Fall in Love" with the adorable Sarah Hayes to begin the Finale. The other Eric, Eric Lindahl has an amazing tenor range. The three females take no back seat to these gentlemen. As previously mentioned, Sarah Hayes is a true delight to watch and listen to. While her range may be somewhat limited compared to the other women, her stage presence is one of pure delight. In fact, this whole cast appears to enjoying what they do--this is not work for them--it is paradise (and for us as well). She is joined by the lovely Stephanie Herman and the powerful Bethany Thomas who takes Arlen's music to new

heights, from her comic "If I Only Had The Nerve" (from "The Wizard of Oz"), her closing of Act One of "Get Happy" and her rendition of "The Man Who Got Away." This is a young lady who can belt out a song and yet blend in with the ensemble for the group numbers. In fact the harmonies in this show are better than one might expect from a big Broadway production.

After they won all the Musical awards for last season, I wondered how they could come back with something that would be on the same level. Guess what? They have done it again. This is a must see and, if we are lucky, they will extend it so that more of you get the opportunity that I enjoyed tonight. Tapping my feet, clapping my hands and in some cases, wanting to sing along, but I held myself back so I could hear these talented people do their thing. "Sweet and Hot" will continue to August 8th with performances as follows:

Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m.
Sundays at 7 p.m.

There are dinner packages available at \$45. Reservations should be made and dinner is served one hour before the curtain. The actors are your servers, so tip generously.

Tickets for just the show are only \$25 and can be ordered by calling 800-595-4849 or online at www.theoubique.org or www.theo-u.org

Parking is available at the free lot located at Morse and Ravenswood with free shuttle transportation before and after the show. If using public transportation, use the Red Line and exit at Morse Avenue, you are almost there.