

MEN OF IVORY

CABARET'S PIANO MEN MAKE YOU LAUGH, CRY, OR (HORRORS!) EVEN SING ALONG.

by Robert W. Cabell and Dan Baillie

If you are just off the bus from Topeka, getting up the nerve to sing *Feelings* at the cabaret joint, *Don't Tell Mama*, or putting together your debut piece for *Rainbow & Stars*, there are a handful of potential accompanists you should know. These players form the backbone of cabaret by keeping their fingers on the pulse of the local talent and music. Whether playing for the cocktail crowd at the Carlyle, the after-theatre crowd at Eighty Eight's, or into the wee hours at Broadway Grill, these popular pianists entertain, delight, and enthrall. (Not to slight the fairer sex, but we were hard-pressed to come up with a notable lady of ivory — since Five Oaks' Marie Blake died. Hence the testosterone-laden group we present here.)

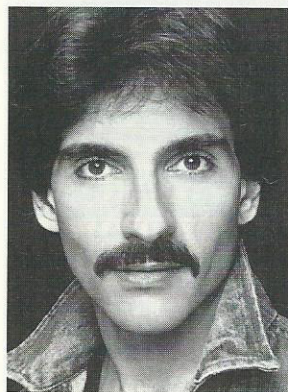
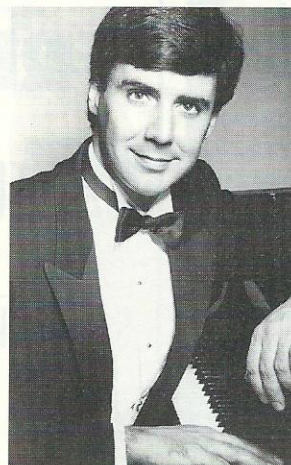


Photo: Kyle Erickson

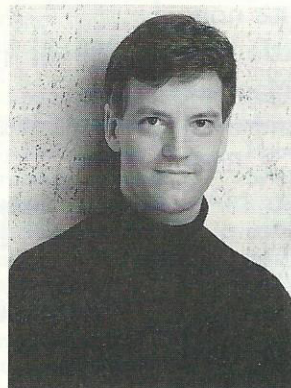
not to ask him to play: "I'll play anything — provided it's written on the back of a 20 dollar bill!"

Steve Bocchino, a Staten Islander and Hunter College grad, has been a fixture at **Brandy's**, one of the Upper East Side's most eclectic cabarets, for ten years. Jazz is his passion, Rogers and Hart his love, and the New York Mets his weakness. Bocchino has directed the music for such cabaret luminaries as Natalie Douglas and Jon Soleather. You're a lucky singer if you've got Steve, one of New York's best off-the-cuff, any-key piano players, on your side. Songs



Michael Devine plays for the swells at **Bemelmans Bar** in the Carlyle Hotel. A Juilliard graduate, he fits in with the mural-dominated walls and classic waiters. Not drinks and munchies, but cocktails and hors d'oeuvres are served to this crowd. Devine is masterfully unobtrusive in his choices, but can also bring a quiet room to life. By chance, you might hear *Moonlight Sonata* sprinkled in with Cole Porter. Songs not to ask him to play: "If you want it, I'll play it — even if I don't like it."

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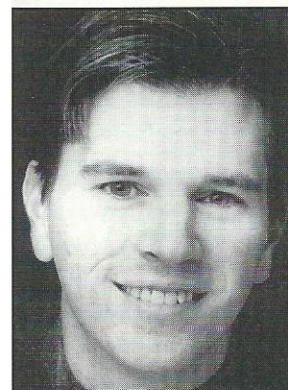
to those slouches who have neglected to purchase it from a record shop. George Gershwin, Burt Bacharach, and James Taylor top his hit list of composers. Songs not to ask him to play: *Piano Man*, *American Pie*, *New York, New York*.

Gerry Dieffenbach, who plays at **Duplex**, is more than a man of ivory. His dual career takes him to the keyboards and in front of them. He was both piano man and lead singer in *Dream*, Broadway's short-lived Johnny Mercer revue. A native New Yorker, he is a recipient of a number of prestigious composing and musical-directing awards. Dieffenbach always has a dozen or more copies of his own CD, *Well Informed*, on hand to sell



way and regional productions as *Cabaret*, *City of Angels*, *Will Rogers Follies*, *Evita*, and *Grease*. Songs not to ask him to play: *My Funny Valentine* or any Andrew Lloyd Webber or *Little Shop of Horrors* tune.

Fred Barton first appeared in New York in 1982 with *Forbidden Broadway*, which he co-created, arranged, and performed in. You can find him every Tuesday and Thursday at **Eighty Eight's** playing Jule Styne tunes and other ditties from the 40s and 50s. Barton has played or conducted such Broad-



open a set with *Willkommen* from *Cabaret* and close with *There's No Business Like Show Business*. Ain't that the truth! Songs not to ask him to play: *Misty*, *Memories*, and *Tomorrow*.

Michael Garvey heads the list of ivory ticklers at **Broadway Grill**, the Great White Way-themed restaurant and cabaret located on the mezzanine of the Crowne Plaza hotel, in the heart of the Broadway theatre district. An actor, singer, dancer, and pianist, this quadruple threat enjoys accompanying the singing staff as well as celebrities who drop by the restaurant before and after taking in a show. Garvey likes to



Tchaikovsky (classical). He likes to open a set with *Lullaby of Broadway*, to set the mood, or say good night with *A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes*. He will play most requests for a five dollar tip; however, *New York, New York*, *Piano Man*, and *My Funny Valentine*, might require a ten dollar coaxing. ■

D. Jay Bradley, one of L.A.'s finest exports, has spent the last six years making music in New York. His talents as a pianist and musical director have earned him seven Dramalogue Awards and a Drama Desk Award. "My real passion is vocal arranging and coaching," says Bradley. And you can hear some of that talent when **Don't Tell Mama's** staff break into one of their outrageous medleys or a compelling vocal duet. Bradley's favorite composers are Sondheim (theatre), Jimmy Webb (pop), and

Hunting for ivory?

Bemelmans Bar at The Carlyle

This yuppie haven across from legendary boîte Cafe Carlyle is the epitome of swank: the perfect place to sip a Cosmopolitan before taking in the show of a celebrity chanteuse or the likes of legendary Bobby Short.

35 East 76th St. (at Madison Avenue)
744-1600

Brandy's

Manhattan's answer to Cheers boasts singing waitpersons who pack a vocal punch — much to the delight of the bridge and tunnel crowd attracted by the friendly open-mike policy. A hoot.

235 East 84th St. (between Second and Third Avenues)
650-1944

Broadway Grill

This restaurant/cabaret, packed with theatrical memorabilia — from a fiberglass statue of Annie that once crowned the original marquee to Rosie O'Donnell's Pink Ladies gang jacket from the revival of *Grease* — is New York's newest theme eatery.

1605 Broadway (at 49th St. in the Crowne Plaza Hotel)
315-6161

Don't Tell Mama

One of the busiest piano bar/cabarets in town. Stellar talents serve drinks and camp the night away with outrageous performances while Broadway gypsies drop in nightly to share the mike.

343 West 46th St. (on Restaurant Row)
757-0788 (no credit cards)

Duplex

Generation X's fave Village song bar. The beach exterior, replete with plastic palm trees and lifeguard station, provides a kitschy backdrop for this rousing piano bar with its great view of the nightly village parade. Fringe cabaret upstairs.

61 Christopher St. (at Seventh Avenue South)
255-5438

Eighty Eight's

The premiere Village piano palace, with its famed upstairs cabaret, features New York's top talent and revues. Obligatory pit stop for cabaret groupies. Downstairs the service staff sing for their supper at the boisterous piano bar.

228 West 10th St. (at Bleecker)
924-0088 (No credit cards)