

With a Little Help From His Friends (and Mom):

LORENZO LAMAS MAKES HIS CENTER CABARET DEBUT

BY LIBBY SLATE

Even when you're a television star, action movie star, Tae Kwon Do black belt and race car driver, Mom can still know best.

At least, that's the case when the actor is Lorenzo Lamas and the mom is actress Arlene Dahl. Early in 2006, Dahl brought her son to a dinner party at the Los Feliz home of singer-pianist-cabaret icon Michael Feinstein, with a particular goal in mind. When each of the guests, among them Lorna Luft, Michele Lee and Dahl herself, got up and sang a song or two, Lamas followed suit—whereupon his host encouraged him to pursue a singing career. Six months later, Feinstein phoned to invite Lamas to perform cabaret at his own New York club.

"My mother had been after me for many years to do something with my voice," recounts Lamas, whose father is the late actor Fernando Lamas and who starred as Jane Wyman's playboy grandson Lance Cumson on the 1981–1990 primetime soap *Falcon Crest*. He went on to the role of action hero Vince Black on *Renegade* and most recently portrayed firefighter Hector Ramirez on the daytime soap *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

"She set this up. She firmly pointed me in the right direction, gave me a kick in the [rear]," Lamas says. "Time is fleeting—if you don't do this, one day you'll never have the chance again."

"This" is Lamas' cabaret show, *Lorenzo Sings About Love*, which he premiered at the Gardenia in Los Angeles, brought to the estimable Feinstein's at the Regency in Manhattan in October–November 2006 to favorable reviews and will perform at the Center's Samueli Theater January 17–20. And though he wasn't a complete novice at singing—he made his movie debut in *Grease*; had a hit record, "Fools Like Me," in 1984; and in recent years has performed regularly at Actors' Fund and other benefits—he was, he says, "excited

and dubious" about Feinstein's invitation.

"New York cabaret is a whole world that people go to and critics review," Lamas explains. "These were things that kept me awake at night. But I swallowed my fear and put it out there. It wasn't perfect. There was room for improvement. I learned from it."

Lamas had followed Feinstein's suggestion to approach Stuart Ross, creator of the long-running revue *Forever Plaid*, to help put his show together and serve as director. "The show is a celebration of love," he says. "Not just the kind of love that happens between people, but between audience and performer. I'm new at this. I tell the audience fun stories, things that happened to my mother and father in the business. We're getting to know each other."

Accordingly, early in the show are two Sammy Cahn standards, "Please Be Kind" and "Teach Me Tonight," a nod to Lamas' relative inexperience. "'Teach Me Tonight' is very appropriate," he says. "It's all about a person being very open to what an audience has to say: 'This is my first affair. Please be kind.' It warms things up." Other selections include the Gershwins' "Embraceable You," Carmichael and Mercer's "In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening" and, reflecting his love of cars and motorcycles, Rodgers and Hammerstein's "The Surrey With the Fringe on Top," which he calls, "The ultimate vehicle seduction song. We've jazzed it up a little."

Fittingly for an endeavor that started with Mom, Lamas also pays tribute to both his parents. Besides sharing stories about them and about growing up in a showbiz setting, he performs a scene from *Casablanca* as Rick, interacting with Dahl's reading of the role of Ilsa on a vintage LP album, and sings songs in Spanish, saluting his dad's Argentinean heritage. Those songs include Rafael Hernandez's "Il Cumban Chero" and a translation of Sid Wayne's



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LORENZO LAMMAS

“It’s Impossible.” “I sing Spanish songs because those remind me of my father,” he says simply. “It helps me connect.”

Lamas may also include songs by John Lennon and material Feinstein thought better to omit in New York, such as contemporary offerings by kd lang, and Cole Porter’s “Night and Day.” “I love that song. It’s all about not being able to breathe without that special person in your life,” Lamas observes. “But Michael said, ‘Night and

threw me. I think I blew a lyric or two. You’re putting it all out there, really trying to connect with the audience, trying to be compelling. I was scanning the audience, and there was a young woman, 22 or 23, dozing. Her parents had dragged her to see an aging soap star [he turns 50 the last night of his Center run].

“I was singing my heart out, and it made me stumble. But now I’m ready. The next person who falls asleep—they’re spaghetti!”

[each day],” he notes. “You go out there and it’s live [to tape]. You’ve got a lot of stuff to say. For cabaret, I actually fell back on techniques from the soap opera: visualization, breathing, let’s get prepared. On the soap, you go out and see the red light on the camera, and you’ve got to remember the words.”

Besides Feinstein and mother Dahl, Lamas counts an old family friend among his cabaret supporters. “[Veteran singer] Vic Damone helped me in getting my voice in shape,” he reveals. “He lives in Florida now and called me almost every night before I went on in New York. He did a movie with my father, *Rich, Young and Pretty*. It was his first movie, and my father took him under his wing. So now he feels like he’s paying back my father.”

It’s a sweet story from a man who clearly knows the meaning of “respect your elders.” After all, says Lamas, who in August marked another performance milestone—his theatrical stage debut, starring in *The King and I* at the Ogunquit Playhouse in Maine—if he hadn’t followed his mother’s instincts, “I would always have wondered.”

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Day’ has been covered so many times by so many phenomenal artists. I don’t think you want to do it in New York.”

It’s just that sort of candor that makes Lamas a refreshing addition to the cabaret scene; critics have praised not only his smooth baritone, but his sense of humor and self-deprecating manner. On stage, he openly admits to four divorces—he has one son and five daughters—and when asked now if there have been any surprises in coming to the cabaret, he answers, “The first time I saw someone dozing off, it

Performing to live audiences instead of cameras took some adjusting, of course, both emotionally and technically. “It was a very scary thing,” Lamas recalls. “Cabaret is such an intimate medium. Michael was a big help. He told me I had to know the songs well, so that I didn’t think about the words and could go to the tables and talk to people.”

His extensive acting experience on filmed projects didn’t prove beneficial, he adds, but his 2004–2007 role on *The Bold and the Beautiful* certainly did. “You learn 30 pages