

Veteran stage cat keeps coming back

Multi-talented mom 'can't win in this town'

Jazz, theatre, art deco coming this summer

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Lyne Tremblay launches enthusiastically into a story about the trials and tribulations of auditioning.

"They needed a pregnant woman and my stomach was out to here," says the Toronto-based actor/singer/dancer, making a round-tummy gesture with her hands.

"But my face is always lean and they told me I didn't look pregnant enough.

"I was ready to give birth in two weeks!" she says, laughing. "But they hired a non-pregnant woman instead and padded her with a cushion."

She frowns slightly. "I can't win in this town."

The Quebec-born Tremblay has lived in Toronto for 20 years, ever since she wowed audiences as the sinuous, so-sexy Siamese cat in the original Toronto production of the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Cats*.

"Being French-Canadian, I have never really felt I fit in anything, especially musical comedy," she explains in utterly fluent, if accented English. "They say I sound too French. That's why I am doing my own thing."

Already a successful cabaret performer who smoothly blends jazz and musical theatre, and with a CD called *Break 'n Enter* to her credit, she has now decided to launch an extended "musical adventure" of her own.

The intention is to use music to bring the two solitudes closer together, and it's quite a blitz.

She will be front and centre at next month's Distillery Jazz Festival: On May 22 and 23, she and actor/director John Evans (her husband) will present their Art Deco Show; on May 26, the Lyne Tremblay Quartet will perform French jazz in a program called *Boulevard de Paris*; and on May 27 Evans will direct her in *Decadent Berlin Revue*. (She will perform the same revue in Barrie the next evening).

Then beginning June 2, she will be at the Lula Lounge on the first Wednesday of each month, building material for a show she is developing called *Entre Nous/Between Us* with the aim of touring it in Quebec and Ontario.

And on June 29 and 30 she will join other performers in a show called *The Groove Suites 5* at Lula again during the Downtown Jazz Festival.

But first she is taking part in the final show of Theatre Français de Toronto's 2003-4 season.

Created and directed by Guy Mignault, the show is *Autour de Kurt Weill*, featuring songs by Weill and others such as Brecht, Jacques Brel and Charles Aznavour.

"Each of the songs is like a mini-play with music," says Tremblay, who is performing with France Gauthier, Robert Godin and Mignault himself at the Berkeley St. Theatre Upstairs, 26 Berkeley St. The show runs from Friday, April 30 to May 15.

The challenge is to make the story within each song come alive, Tremblay says. "But I don't want to be sentimental or cute."

"I am so looking forward to sustaining these songs. That is the sort of work I love."

The 45-year-old mother of two daughters, aged 15 and 11, is in superlative shape and will demonstrate an impressive high kick at the drop of a hat.

She looks as if she could slip back into that slinky, Siamese-cat leotard tomorrow.

She is vivacious, extroverted and brimming with energy.

"I am not shy on stage," she says with a touch of understatement. "I love to have fun with audiences and the musicians although I love to go internal (to explore a role) too."

She is the eldest of three sisters; her father is in construction, her mother has had a variety of jobs including seamstress and running a flower shop.

"They are wonderful," Tremblay says. "Everything they touch is filled with passion and love."

Tremblay's earliest dream was to become a doctor but she began dancing as a child "improvising my heart out" to dance shows on television. (Cyd Charisse was an early favourite.)

Performing an improvised dance to the music of Glenn Miller "was the first moment in my life when I felt like something."

She made her professional debut at the age of 14 in a production of *The Merry Widow* in Quebec city.

Her unforgettable cat won her much media attention in Toronto in the mid-1980s, even though she was not a soloist.

"I did my homework and researched Siamese cats thoroughly. I wrote my own script through the show and charted my relationship with each character."

"The Siamese cat is unique and very



Actor/singer/dancer Lyne Tremblay made her sexy reputation two decades ago in a local production of *Cats*.

special and I knew where I could apply various character traits to each moment."

She says she received a call the other day asking if the show had helped her career and enabled her to buy a house.

"On \$400 minus commission? I don't think so. Does anything really help your career in Toronto?"

After finishing an 18-month stint in *Cats*, she replaced Ute Lemper in a production of *Cabaret*, touring Europe and sharing the role of Sally Bowles with another performer.

"That was another adventure and John and I were away for a year," she says. "I came back and got pregnant the next day."

Then "somebody discovered I had a voice and that was a blessing. Being a dancer, do you know how hard I had to work for my money?"

She got into musical cabaret with a show called *Gauche* (a quiet reference to not fitting in) about seven or eight years ago, and the new career began to snowball from that point on.

"There was this hand in my back, pushing me in that direction," Tremblay says. "You have got to trust life."

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