

## Queer Cabaret

This research guide is designed to accompany the Oct. 24 performance by Phranc and My Barbarian and the April 17 performance by John Kelly in the Queer Cabaret series of events presented by Visions and Voices.

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### Events

[Phranc and My Barbarian](#)  
Friday, October 24, 2008 : 7pm

[John Kelly as Joni Mitchell](#)  
Friday, April 17, 2009 : 7pm

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### Introduction

The two-part performance series Queer Cabaret was organized by Richard Meyer and David Roman of USC College. It features performances by lesbian punk folksinger Phranc and L.A.-based art/performance troupe My Barbarian on October 24 and John Kelly's Obie-Award winning reinterpretation of Joni Mitchell on April 17. The series explores how influential queer artists have contributed to the revival and reinvention of the cabaret genre in recent years. Meyer, Roman, and Ross Scimeca of the USC Libraries have selected the following resources to help you explore the history of the cabaret and its transformation by queer performers.

The modern origins of the cabaret art form can be traced back to 1881 at a tavern called *Le Chat Noir* (or The Black Cat) in the Montmartre district of Paris. Afterwards, cabaret acts quickly spread to major European cities during the 1890s. Typically performed in intimate social spaces like *Le Chat Noir*, cabarets featured variety acts that satirized political, social, and sexual mores. The online Gale Virtual Reference Library—which you can access via the USC Libraries' electronic resources page—features several articles about the history and cultural influence of the cabaret form.

From the beginning, gay and bisexual performers and impresarios played a vital role in the development of the art form. The well-known Bob Fosse film *Cabaret*—based on Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories*—evokes this long history, which Phranc, My Barbarian, and John Kelly draw from in highly imaginative ways.

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### Philosophy/Humanities Librarian



Ross Scimeca

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### Further Reading and Viewing

*Cast Out: Queer Lives in Theater*

By Robin Bernstein  
University of Michigan Press, 2006  
Doheny Library PN1590.G39C37 2006

*Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making*

By Fiona Buckland  
Wesleyan University Press, 2002  
Doheny Library HQ76.3.U5B83 2002

*Utopia in Performance*

By Jill Dolan  
University of Michigan Press, 2006  
Doheny Library PN1936.D65 2005

*Cabaret*

By Bob Fosse  
Leavey Library LVYDVD 53

*The Berlin Stories*

By Christopher Isherwood  
J. Laughlin, 1945  
Grand Library 820.179tb

*Staging Desire: Queer Readings of American Theater History*

By Kim Marra  
University of Michigan Press, 2002  
Doheny Library PS338.H66S73 2002

*Performance in America: Contemporary US Culture and the Performing Arts*

By David Román  
Duke University Press, 2005  
Doheny Library PN1590.S6R66 2005

*O Solo Homo: The New Queer Performance*

By David Román and Holly Hughes  
Grove Press 1998  
Doheny Library PS627.H67O2 1998

*The Scene of Harlem Cabaret*

By Shane Vogel  
University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2009

*The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theater*

By Alisa Solomon  
New York University Press, 2002  
Doheny Library PN2270.G39Q44 2002

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### Learn about the Performers

- Phranc is a lesbian punk folksinger with a devoted following. She got her start in the late 70s synth rock band Nervous Gender. She has a [Myspace page](#) and a [blog](#).
- My Barbarian is an art-performance troupe that stages rock operas, folk plays, theatrical situations, and music videos. They will perform Non-Western, a "historiographic fantasia about L.A. in the 1840s." You can visit their [Web site](#) to learn more.
- John Kelly is a performance and visual artist whose work began in New York's East Village clubs in the early 1980's. Since then, he has created more than 30 performance pieces, including Paved Paradise—which is about Joni Mitchell and the progressive social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. His [Web site](#) gives an overview of his career and performances.

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