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## Ol' Blue Eyes Returns to Hollywood

*Hoboken To Hollywood / Edgemar Center for the Arts / Santa Monica, CA*  
*Reviewed by Ethan Silver for Riveting Riffs Magazine*

Photo by James W. Thompson



Roll camera, and...action! You arrive at Edgemar Center for the Arts and the performers are already onstage as a pianist plays you into what appears to be a television studio complete with a five-tiered stage and control room. Studio hosts assist in seating guests as the crew members are working, the musicians are schmoozing and the camera operators are getting situated. You wonder if the onstage cameras will actually be recording or if it is all just a part of the show. After given a "five minutes to show-time" call, the last audience members find their seats in the packed house and the action begins. Welcome to *Hoboken To Hollywood: A Journey Through The Great American Songbook*.

Although mostly a musical concert, *Hoboken To Hollywood* gives the audience enough of a plot to complement the vocals and to add a fun and unique element to the production. In the story, the audience is present for a live television taping featuring a well-known chairman of the board crooner. Just before the taping begins, we are informed that the assistant director has a family emergency, leaving the charge to a stressed out Andy (Pat Towne), a type "A" personality in need of a vacation and some Xanax. Towne elicits lots of laughter in this skillfully played role, and with minimal dialogue presents a character that is exceptionally enjoyable to watch, as he fulfills multiple positions within the show in a tireless and energetic performance.

While *Hoboken* is light on dialogue, it is chock-full of incredible music as The Crooner (Luca Ellis) sings over eighteen classic songs from the 40s and 50s. Ellis beautifully channels the style of the time with a voice that exudes such charisma and confidence that you can close your eyes and envision Sinatra himself. Every note is accounted for with a sound as perfect as a recording. One patron was overheard saying, "...he may actually be better than Frank Sinatra." Ellis even opens the set list to the audience, ending with *New York, New York* and *My Way*. Ellis (who also co-wrote the show) is definitely one to watch as he is sure to bring his style to the mainstream.

Also impressive is the twelve piece orchestral band complete with drums, piano, saxophones, trombones and trumpets. Led by Paul Litteral (Co-Creator and Music Director), the band is comprised of talented musicians with enough experience to max out any iPod. From Whitney Houston to The Brian Setzer Orchestra to the Los Angeles Philharmonic to Broadway, these musicians have done it all and are an absolute treat for the ears, masterfully touching every beat down to the last trill. Every musician is given a solo, however, the saxophones in the song *Route 66* are especially deserving of note, rousing the audience and raising the energy level that much higher.

Not only is the performance impressive, but the show boasts a video element never before seen in a theater by this reviewer. Two mobile cameras in the style of a 1960s television show and complete with operators capture The Crooner's performance from multiple angles. A third angle comes from a stationary camera in the audience. This live footage is monitored and cut in real time from inside the onstage control room and projected onto screens above the stage, looking exactly like it would on a true TV show. So, not only is the audience able to see the live show in front of them, but also the action from a home viewer's perspective. Kudos goes to Director Jeremy Aldridge for bringing this idea to the stage. We are also treated to live commercials from sponsors such as Shmimex watches as well as fully produced video commercials that air on the screens above in conjunction with perfectly timed music from the live orchestra.

It is recommended to arrive at the theater at least 20 minutes early. The show is attracting lots of attention and thus, ticket sales, and patrons find themselves waiting in a cramped, makeshift line in the lobby. Be sure to get an advantageous spot in the front of the line to have your pick of seats and to avoid having to wait in the spot next to the restrooms. I also recommend avoiding the seats on the far right side of the theater as The Crooner lights up a real cigarette onstage and proceeds to sing an entire song while the smoke hangs over the crowd. The song is beautiful but the smell and smoke however, is not.

With the music being performed live, it will behoove the sound-sensitive theatergoer to bring earplugs as the volume level does get moderately high, although only at certain moments. Children are welcome at this production, but only if they can enjoy at two hour concert, including a fifteen minute intermission.

This production comes highly recommended and is a must see for crooner connoisseurs. The only thing missing is a duet to offer a change-of-pace. From "Swinging On A Star," to "Young At Heart," enthusiasts will revel in a live performance of the best music from the good old days where music had class, Sinatra was king and life was simple in *Hoboken To Hollywood*.

*Hoboken To Hollywood* plays at the Edgemar Center for the Arts in Santa Monica, CA. Performances run Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00pm and Sundays at 3:00 through December 12<sup>th</sup>.