

# Hoboken To Hollywood

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Start spreading the news! There's a new singing star on the horizon and his name is Luca Ellis.

Ellis's cameo appearance in last December's *A Vegas Holiday! Songs From "Live At The Sahara"* prompted this reviewer to describe the 21st Century crooner as "heartthrob-handsome" and "a vocal dead-ringer for Frank Sinatra." These words ring truer than ever in *Hoboken To Hollywood: A Journey Through The Great American Songbook*, the exciting new musical production now playing at Santa Monica's Edgemar Center For The Arts.

*Hoboken To Hollywood* (directed with flair by Jeremy Aldridge) imagines the taping of a 1960s TV special ("brought to you in Living Color") starring Ol' Blue Eyes himself, and allows Ellis to graduate from the three songs he performed in *Louis And Keely's Vegas revue* to nearly two dozen mid-20th Century standards, each of which showcases the star-to-be's velvet vocals and matinee idol charisma.

Co-creators Ellis and Paul Litteral (who musical directed this and the Vegas show at the El Portal) have done their homework well, giving *Hoboken To Hollywood* the look and feel of an authentic TV taping, 1960s style television cameras, sound booth, and all. Book writers Ellis, Litteral, and Aldridge have even created a storyline of sorts, which has second assistant director "Andy" (Pat Towne) promoted last-minute to directing the TV special—to his frazzled dismay. The device, while a bit overused, does allow our leading man the kind of mid-taping temper tantrum that *First-Take Sinatra* was apparently known for, as well as allowing Ellis to show off his acting chops.

There are also TV commercials, a pair for the very first Ford Mustang, with its optional automatic transmission, sporty "bucket seats," and a price tag of well under \$2500, and two for "Shmimex" watches: "It takes a lickin' and keeps on ... telling time." (Apparently Ford was more generous about use of its trademark than Timex.)

Still, these TV special trappings are but icing on the cake for a breakthrough performance by a young vocalist who could soon share star status with Harry Connick Jr. and Michael Bublé. "Bye, Bye, Blackbird," "Call Me Irresponsible," "Old Black Magic," "That's Life," "You're Nobody Till Somebody Loves You," "Blue Moon," "Fly Me To The Moon," "One For My Baby," and "Young At Heart" are but nine of the Sinatra classics performed by his vocal Doppelgänger (with George Clooney looks).

Backing Ellis is the biggest and swingiest 12-piece band you're likely ever to hear in an intimate theater production here or anywhere else: Josh C. Harris, Robbie Hioki, Colin Krupa, Craig Krupa, Jim Jedeikin, Nicholas Klingenberg, Litteral, Paul McDonald, Steve Pemberton, Ron Sewer, arranger/bandleader Kendall Wallace, and Damon Zick, with actor Jeff Markgraff conducting them as real-life bandleader-orchestrator-longtime Sinatra collaborator Nelson Riddle.

Completing the first-rate cast are Al Bernstein as famed TV director Dwight Hemion, Franci Montgomery as breathy-voiced spokesmodel Darlene, Chandler Hill as an announcer based on Timex spokesman John Cameron Swayze, Anna Hanson as Liisa, and Aaron Star as Cameraman #1. (A second cameraman is not billed in the program.)

Towne in particular does fine comedic work as Andy. That being said, his eleventh hour vocal solo, however amusing, should end on the cutting room floor, leaving the focus on Ellis's vocals—where it deserves to be.

Kathi O'Donohue lights art director James W. Thompson's authentic-looking bandstand set with vivid rainbow colors. Ron Hitchcock's sound design makes for a perfect mix of Ellis's vocals and the big backup band. Jessica Olson's costumes have a great mid-1960s look, with special snaps for Ellis's snazzy suits and narrow ties and accessorizing tie clips. *Hoboken To Hollywood* is produced by Peach Reasoner. Michael Blaha is co-producer, JJ Mayes assistant director, and Michael Town director of photography. Jericha Griffin is stage manager and Phillip Ring is assistant stage manager.

If last night's sell-out crowd is any indication, *Hoboken To Hollywood* could well go on to the kind of long-running, award-winning smash hit status achieved by *Louis And Keely Live At The Sahara*—and give Ellis the stardom that's rightly his. Reserve your tickets in advance. *Hoboken To Hollywood* is well on its way to becoming L.A.'s hottest ticket show.

Edgemar Center for the ArtS, 2437 Main Street, Santa Monica. Through December 12. Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00. Sundays at 3:00. Reservations: 310 392-7327. [www.edgemarcenter.org](http://www.edgemarcenter.org)

--Steven Stanley  
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Photos: James W. Thompson