

The Dunsmore Room at Schooner's Supper Club
Presents

The 2026 NMTE New Works Cabaret!

With new music by:

Brenda Varda, Kevin Bowen, Benjamin Emory Larson,
Janet Preus, Maureen Kane Berg, Tom Berg, Mike Salmanson,
Rick Rhobajt Widen, Robert Elhai, Fred Steele,
Mariénne Kreitlow, Mike Nilles, & Keith Benson.

& special guest artists:

Elena Glass, Nicole Korbisch, Anna Beth Baker, Carmelita Guse,
Eryn Tvete, Janely Rodriguez, Tom Berg, & Zakary Thomas Morton

& thanks to John Steitz, sound design; Krishna Mishra, booking manager;
Jay Fuchs, marketing assistant; and Zach Thayer, technical director.

The New Musical Theatre Exchange 2026 New Works:

“Strings Attached,” and “Water from Snow” from the musical *Water from Snow* by Janet Preus, Fred Steele, and Robert Elhai, accompanying, and featuring vocalist Janely Rodriguez. In “*Strings Attached*,” Kathy, the protagonist, has spent most of her life trying to escape her mother’s belittling and control. When she’s summoned back to her little northern Minnesota town, following her mother Gwynne’s death, Kathy discovers that she is the heir to the cafe Gwynne owned in their hometown. But there are “strings attached.” Kathy will have to run it for a full year—and make money—or she will inherit nothing. Yes, her mother’s control extends beyond the grave! In the song “*Water from Snow*,” a turning point moment is shared with her daughter Annie, Kathy recalls her beloved Grandpa Ya’s words to her, and draws strength from the support of her friends and neighbors, giving her hope that “spring will follow winter ...” In the final refrain the entire ensemble forms a glorious chorus to close the show. In this case, Janely sings so beautifully, I’m sure you can imagine the four-part harmony.

“Macak,” “You Hold My Interest,” and “How Do I Create?” from *Tesla’s Mistress* by Mariénne Kreitlow, accompanying, and featuring vocalists Tom

Berg and Nicole Korbisch. *Set in America during an era of endless innovations, men competitively grabbed for patent rights, money, power and fame, while the inventor Nikola Tesla lost at playing that game. Tesla’s Mistress probes into his brilliant and undaunted psyche, exposing Tesla’s human vulnerability through the eyes of the mostly-overlooked women who loved him. “Macak” is a flashback to Tesla’s boyhood home in Serbia. TESLA (Niko) with his mother DJOUKA. “You Hold My Interest” 1916, New York, TESLA meets PRINCESS VILMA LWOFF-PARLAGHY at her studio. “How Do I Create?” A later meeting at Vilma’s studio.*

“With You,” from *Anzhelina & Karina* by Keith Benson, with Brenda Varda accompanying, and featuring vocalists Nicole Korbisch and Zakary Thomas Morton. *After serving four horrific years as Sister of Mercy, a war nurse for Russian soldiers in the first world war, Anzhelina meets Nikolai, a Russian soldier with severe shell shock, on her voyage from Russia to live in America. Nikolai is in great distress during their voyage, and Anzhelina cares for him. Once in America, she’s determined to help him get started in this new world. As time passes, their feelings grow.*

“How Could You Know?” from *A House Divided* by Maureen Kane Berg, Tom Berg, and Mike Salmanson, with Brenda Varda accompanying, and featuring vocalists Carmelita Guse & Eryn Tvete. *A House Divided explores how behind-the-scenes friendships and rivalries in the Lincoln White House shaped the tumultuous history that led to the Emancipation Proclamation. This song focuses on the friendship between Mary Lincoln and the remarkable seamstress and businesswoman, the formerly enslaved Elizabeth Keckley. Willie Lincoln’s passing leaves Mary in a state of self-centered grief and near-delirium. Keckley, who has progressed from seamstress to a member of the Lincoln household, attempts to comfort her. When Mary asks, “Has anyone ever known loss like this?” Elizabeth Keckley tells her yes, and shares some of her own difficult story.*

“If I Only Knew” from *Foshay!* A true story written by Kevin Bowen & Lynn Bowen. Arranged by William Brueggemann, with Brenda Varda accompanying, and featuring vocalist Elena Glass. *The year is 1917. At the humble Foshay residence in Minneapolis, Leota Foshay questions whether she should stay married to her overly ambitious husband, Wilbur Burton Foshay, after he incorporates the W. B. Foshay Company without telling her first.*

“Up Against The Wall” from *Metaland: A 21st C. Vaudeville* by Brenda Varda, accompanying, featuring vocalist Elena Glass. *It is 2054. And live entertainment is illegal...but down in a bunker a troupe of ragged circus artists try to survive by entertaining whatever audience has snuck in that night in a bunker that has no digital connection. And no electronic instrumentation. First up? Jen-E-Waye, a dancer/acrobat who has had to balance on the wire of existence.*

“Before The Baby Comes” from *Socks & Shoes & Coats* by Rick Rhobajt Widen, singing, with Benjamin Emory Larson accompanying, featuring vocalist Anna Beth Baker. *Spouse and Partner are expecting! And oh my if there aren't a million things to buy, babyproof, and learn, before the baby comes!*

“Time Travel” and “You Suck,” from *How to Play the Cello (Until You Don't)* by Benjamin Emory Larson, featuring cellist and vocalist Anna Beth Baker. *How to Play the Cello (Until You Don't) is an edgy, classical crossover one-woman one-act loosely based on the life of Jacqueline Du Pré, one of the greatest cellists of all time, whose career—and life—was cut short by severe multiple sclerosis. In this opening song, “Time Travel,” Jackie wakes up in her wheelchair longing to play her cello, and uses music to travel back in time to reunite with her beloved instrument. In “You suck” A teenaged Jackie grapples with the tenacity, time, and sacrifice it takes to pursue excellence.*

“Patches and Glue” from the musical *ACTS* by Rick Rhobait Widen, with Benjamin Emory Larson accompanying, featuring vocalists Elena Glass and Zakary Thomas Morton. *In a fruit grove somewhere outside of a Syrian town, circa 42 CE, Hannah and Saul have grown close enough in their friendship to open up about the losses of their children and spouses.*

“It's Just the Rest of My Life!” and “Nowhere Particular,” from *It's Just the Rest of My Life!* by Mike Nilles, singing, and featuring vocalist Mark McCullough. *“It's Just the Rest of My Life!” is the title song of a rock-musical intended for high school audiences, addressing the pressure and uncertainty upper grade students experience. In “Nowhere in Particular,” the student protagonist expresses their desire to see and experience living in all corners of the world before deciding how and where they'll spend the rest of their life. Orchestrations by Bill Kelm.*

“The Symphony of You” from *Metaland: A 21st C. Vaudeville* by Brenda Varda, accompanying, featuring vocalist Zakary Thomas Morton. *The Metaland troupe has gotten into a fight — and the one quieter circus member, the psychic sensate Timor, is called on to ‘entertain’ while differences are resolved. Oh, one thing... Timor cannot speak. His skill? He knows much more about everyone than he should.*

“Somewhere Tonight” from *A House Divided* by Maureen Kane Berg, Tom Berg, and Mike Salmanson, with Brenda Varda accompanying, and featuring vocalists Carmelita Guse & Eryn Tvete. *Mary Lincoln has started to come out of her extreme state of mourning for her son Willie. She and her friend Elizabeth Keckley are coming to a new point in their friendship -- a somewhat more balanced place.*

“Paint By Number World” from *The Forger's Apprentice* by Kevin Bowen, Mark Forgy & C.S. McNerlin. Arranged by Martha Davis, with Brenda Varda accompanying, featuring vocalist Zakary Thomas Morton. *1968. While visiting the Island of Ibiza on a break from college, Mark Forgy accepts an offer to move into the residence of Elmyr de Hory, the 20th century's most notorious art forger, thus abandoning the paint-by-number life he had in Minnesota to become Elmyr's personal assistant and body guard.*

“With You (Reprise) and “New Hope” from the musical *Anzhelina & Karina* by Keith Benson, with accompanist Brenda Varda, featuring Nicole Korbisch and Zakary Thomas Morton. *Nikolai is caught in a tremendous explosion on Wall Street. He is not physically injured, but his mind is shaken greatly as all his memories of the war send him into shock.. In his delirium, his mind begins to settle on his love for Anzhelina. He hears her voice in his thoughts...*



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Artist Bios:

Anna Beth Baker is a Twin Cities actor, singer, and cellist drawn most to stories about people that live life to their fullest and deepest capacity. She hopes to embody truth, authenticity, and bravery wherever she goes and with whatever story she tells. Anna Beth was born in Duluth, grew up on the east coast, and transplanted back to MN to find a theatrical home. She received her MFA in Acting from FSU/Asolo Conservatory in Sarasota, FL in 2021. www.annabethbaker.com

Keith Benson is a musical theater writer living in Eden Prairie. He has always had a passion for craftsmanship and spent over thirty years developing technologies and approaches toward the craft of professional portraiture. His inventions in this field have been employed to produce tens of millions of portraits each year. More recently, he has come to embrace the craft of musical theater development.

Maureen Kane Berg Along with Michael Salmanson and Tom Berg, Maureen has contributed to the book, lyrics and music for *A House Divided*. Maureen's musical comedy *Got It Made* and its shortened version, *(Almost) Got It Made*, have been performed in theaters from Georgia to Washington State and published by Heuer Publishing. Maureen developed and co-wrote two musical comedy revues for *The Public Offenders*, a troupe that performed at Zanies Comedy Club in Chicago. Her short plays *Decomposition*, *Lawyers In Love*, and *A Bug In Your Ear* have been featured in multiple regional theater festivals. www.maureenkaneberg.com

Tom Berg Beyond his day job as a law professor, Tom regularly performs with the Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Company. He's played the "Modern Major General" (*Pirates of Penzance*) for both GSVLOC and Cross Community Players. Other recent shows have been with Cross, Rosetown Playhouse, and Legacy Musical Theater. He co-composed *A House Divided* with his spouse, NMTE member Maureen Kane Berg, and Michael Salmanson.

Kevin Bowen is a playwright and songwriter living in Eagan, Minnesota. He also works as a professional graphic designer at Bowen Design, which he started and has operated since 1995. He's a member of the Playwright's Center and the New Musical Theatre Exchange. His plays and musicals have been produced and staged throughout Minnesota. For more information about any of his completed plays or new works (www.kevinbowendesign.com), please email Kevin at: tctheater@gmail.com

Robert Elhai, Tony and Drama Desk nominee for the orchestrations to Broadway's *The Lion King*, is based in Minneapolis where his music has been performed by many local theater companies. His arrangements have been heard at many music venues on the air and around the world. Film score orchestrations include the Oscar-winning score to *Frida* and the enormously successful *Fast and Furious* franchise.

Elena Glass is a singer, actress, writer and intimacy coordinator based in the Twin Cities. Onstage, she's been seen at the Ordway, History Theatre, ArtistryMN, Nautilus Music Theatre, Yellow Tree Theatre and Old Log Theatre, among others. She performed her critically-acclaimed one-woman show, 'Loudly, Clearly, Beautifully' at three venues last year, with four encores in 2026 planned. Proud member of Actor's Equity Association. Instagram: [eglass789](https://www.instagram.com/eglass789).

While living in the Twin Cities, **Carmelita Guse** sang with The Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Company, Mixed Precipitation Theatre, the Minnesota Opera Chorus, and the Minnesota Chorale. She currently lives in Sioux Falls, SD, where she is an adjunct voice professor at Augustana University. While *A House Divided* was being developed, Carmelita performed the role of Elizabeth Keckley, and she is thrilled to have the opportunity to portray Keckley in tonight's performance!

Nicole Korbisch - Blessed to have performed all around the country, Nicole is excited to be back in the Midwest and performing new works by brilliant writers. Seen recently as the titular Patsy Cline in *Always, Patsy Cline*, on the improv stage with The Peabody Players, and teaching theatre to your kiddos. Catch Nicole up in Bemidji this summer, performing all summer-long at The Paul Bunyan Playhouse.

Marienne Kreitlow - Lyricist, Composer, Poet, Performance Artist, Playwright. Other musicals: *Excelsius*, "Yours, Thrognog," *Trouble in Grimmland*, *Earl Tracy*. She believes art can foster self-empowerment while being thoroughly entertaining. Her mission statement? "juxtaposition = confusion = recalibration = delight = new reality" www.marienne.com www.teslasmistress.com

Benjamin Emory Larson is a playwright, composer, lyricist, music director, and pianist in the Twin Cities. Two of his shows have been semi-finalists for The National Music Theater Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, and he has been nominated for two Portland Area Musical Theater Awards: Outstanding Original Musical and Outstanding Original Score. His work has been programmed, workshopped, and performed by Theater Latté Da, The Los Angeles LGBT Center, Teatro Latea in New York, Chicago Musical Theatre Festival, Casa 0101 in Los

Angeles, A Little New Music, Nautilus Music-Theater, Theatre Elision, Reno Pops Orchestra, New Musicals Inc, Under the Arch Incubator, Rosetown Playhouse, The Central Oregon Youth Orchestra, Opera Bend, Phoenix Theater, Kitsap Fringe Opera, and others.

Zakary Thomas Morton is excited to make their Crooner's debut, and to bring the work of local writers to life. Supporting and performing the stories of local creators is important, and helping create a new character is always thrilling. Zakary was most recently seen as Molina in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Teatro del Pueblo), and you can find them next as Nathan Lukowski (yes, the 12 year-old son) in *The Full Monty* (Theatre 55).

Mike Nilles is a songwriter and producer/engineer currently working on *It's Just the Rest of My Life!*, a rock-musical for high school audiences about the pressures of choosing a post-secondary path. He previously led Twin Cities bands including *Smart Alex*—whose single “Chitter Chat” became a collector’s item—and *Swing Set*, winner of *Mpls/St. Paul* magazine’s 1990 Best Pop/Rock Band Album. His song “Blackout” has appeared in *Stranger Things* and other Netflix productions. As a solo artist and collaborator, Mike has earned songwriting awards and composed commissioned works for clients including Joe Mauer’s family, 3M, and *Out On a Limb Dance Theater*.

Janet Preus is a playwright, songwriter/lyricist and writer/editor, based at her cabin on a lake in northern Minnesota. She spent much of her life teaching theater and directing, while directing and singing with a vocal jazz group, which she founded. She reviewed Twin Cities theater for www.howwastheshow.com for several years, pre-pandemic. Most recently, produced and directed the regional premiere of “*Water from Snow*” (co-composers Robert Elhai and Fred Steele.)
www.janetpreuswriter.com.

Janely Rodriguez (she/they/he) hails from Miami, FL and holds a B.F.A in Musical Theatre from Brenau University. She is a proud member of the Acting Company at CTC and has enjoyed roles in *Dr. Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*, *Disney's Frozen The Broadway Musical*, *A Year With Frog and Toad*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Annie* at Children's Theatre Company. They've also had the pleasure of working with other organizations throughout the Twin Cities including the Guthrie Theater (Cabaret), Trademark Theater (*The Reunion*), Theater Latté Da (*Hello Dolly*), *Ten Thousand Things* (*Iphigenia at Aulis*), and *Artisty Theater* (*Shrek the Musical*, *Songs for a New World*).

Rick. Rhobajt Widen is a writer of several musicals and plays which have been workshoped or produced at Festival 56, The Minnesota Fringe Festival, New Musicals Inc., The Playwrights’ Center, Nautilus Music Theatre Composer Librettist Studio, Highlands Elementary School, Theatre Resources Unlimited, Renegade Theatre Company, and at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. He has also written numerous video scripts and articles on songwriting and music theory for PBS.org, Soundfly.com, and Tonaltrends.com, and has recorded many albums of music and played guitar and banjo on many records with various groups.
www.rhobajt.com

Michael J. Salmanson began writing as a lyricist for Princeton University’s famed musical comedy troupe, The Triangle Club. A song he co-wrote was subsequently chosen to be included in the Club’s 100th Anniversary show, and selected as one of the top songs from a 123-year span to be published. He continued to write, perform and direct musical comedy at the University of Chicago (where he met his collaborators Maureen and Tom Berg). An American History major, Mike developed *A House Divided* based on years of research into the personal life of Lincoln and those around him.

Eryn Tvete obtained her music degree from the University of Minnesota Duluth and has been performing in the Twin Cities area since 2006. She currently performs in the MN Opera chorus and is the managing director and master of ceremonies for *Opera on Tap Twin Cities*. Locally, she has also performed with the MN Chorale, *Minnesänger*, *Out of the Box Opera*, *Opera on the Lake*, *Mill City Summer Opera*, *Gilbert and Sullivan Very Light Opera Company*, *Bloomington Civic Theatre* and the *Next Festival* with *Theater Latté Da*

Brenda Varda is a writer/composer, director, and coach in theatre, music, and new media. As a musical director, she collaborates on bringing new stories to life. Her original works explore the unspoken, difficult, and complex: *Wench Upon the Stage*, *Fables du Theatre*, *Liquid*, *Stolen Focus*, *Alice Thru the Wormhole*, *A Wasted Evening with Tom Lehrer* - and her solo shows, *This is My Garbage* and *Nine Dresses*. She worked with many Los Angeles theatre companies, including *Sacred Fools*, *The Met*, and *Unknown Theatre* – and received awards (*Ovations*, *Hollywood Fringe*), and grants from several organizations. Influenced by her work at Caltech, she is starting *Sci-Arts* in MN, and is curating a full *Earth Week* of artists' work at the *Phoenix Theatre!*

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