

Volume 18 • Issue 19 | Sep. 30 - Oct 06, 2005



Opera singer Nancy Evans goes caberet Thursday, September 29 at The Knitting Factory's Tap Room.

## Carmen meets Cole Porter at The Knitting Factory

By Michael Clive

What took Nancy Evans so long to get downtown? Well, she was busy. In recent years the versatile soprano, who unveils her offbeat new revue at The Knitting Factory on Thursday at 8 p.m., has traveled to four continents to sing 10 operatic heroines, including five demanding title roles — four of whom die, presumably of vocal exhaustion.

In "Love with a Twist," Evans takes a break from all that to show a zanier, more intimate side. Her show combines operatic arias and art songs with tunes by Cole Porter, Lerner and Loewe, Jerome Kern and more. (And that's just the first act; in the second, she brings out the wigs and hats.)

In advance of Thursday's premiere, which was virtually sold out at press time, The Knitting Factory was scrambling to add another date for "Love with a Twist." Still, opera fans might wonder just what a legitimate soprano is doing with a cabaret act. After all, Evans' voice is



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noted for the quality that the Italians call “spinto” — a combination of power and focus that can fill the biggest auditoriums by dint of sheer volume.

“You have to be very secure in your technique to make the transition,” says Evans. “A lot of opera singers are afraid that if they emote in a song, they’ll start to belt. But my voice is so loud that I don’t have to. I carry a lot of emotion in my sound — I use my gut.”

Crossing the boundaries between opera, musical comedy, jazz, oratorio and art song inevitably brings up the dreaded c-word: crossover. When an opera singer migrates into pop territory, or vice-versa, enthusiasts of each genre gear up for battle...and often get one. The latest skirmish made headlines just last week, when opera diva Aprile Millo — like Evans, a spinto soprano — cancelled a crossover booking at Carnegie Hall rather than sing rock numbers selected by mega-producer Ron Delsener.

“Aprile Millo? Really?” asked Evans, demonstrating impeccable dramatic technique. “I hadn’t heard about it.” Rather than dish dirt, Evans cited examples such as Eileen Farrell, a leading dramatic soprano of the 1960s and 70s. “Farrell was a terrific jazz singer,” she said. “And did you ever hear Ethel Merman sing opera? I saw some video excerpts from when she was very young, maybe in her twenties. Unbelievable.”

Growing up with musical comedy performers in her family, Evans took past stars like Merman as her idols. “This kind of music is in my bones,” she says. In “Love with a Twist” Evans combines this affection with a knack for quick vocal gear changes and a fearless four-member band. Imagining, for example, what would happen if Bizet’s sultry Carmen sang Lerner and Loewe’s breezy “Almost Like Being in Love,” she takes crossover where it has never gone before. After her second performance at The Knitting Factory, she’ll take the show to another familiar venue: the road.

Visit [knittingfactory.com](http://knittingfactory.com) for ticket info.

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*Downtown Express* is published by  
Community Media LLC.

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