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Skylight past and present in “The Long and the Short of It” opens at Skylight

By Michael Ray



Colin and Paula Cabot, photo by Katherine Biehl

Imagine for a moment that a company’s history had to be distilled down to a single show—the contours of 50 years wrapping around an audience and presenting a picture of life in fast forward. Imagine that it had to entertain as well, say with song-and-dance medleys and witty anecdotes. Throw in a tap dance as well.

*The Long and the Short of It*, currently playing at the Skylight Opera Theatre, manages to do all these things, transforming the intimate Studio Theatre into a charming party that maps Skylight’s own history.

The show is more than just a man on a piano and a woman charming the audience with her extensive vocal range, however. The gracious hosts, Paula and Colin Cabot, both have an extensive history of their own with the company.

Colin got his start as founder Clair Richardson’s assistant, rose to the position of Managing Director and remains a key figure in the Theatre’s development. Paula, his wife, starred in various productions during the 80s and 90s, many of which are referenced musically throughout the show.



Photo by Katherine Biehl

Colin takes the audience through those early days, weaving together stories of Skylight founder Clair Richardson, whose ashes joined his protégé on stage in morbid hilarity, and the theatre's many transitions.

Whether enticing the audience to give a planned gift (“There are no pockets in a shroud”) or talking about shorthand for auditions (VPL means visible panty line, by the way), Colin's humor cut through the audience and left them rolling. These anecdotes glue the show together, providing an amusing contrast with his wife's songs or medleys.

Paula managed to string together series of beautiful songs, from shows as varied as *Guys and Dolls* to *The Threepenny Opera*. Her natural talent, keen sense of timing and knack for entertaining engaged the audience completely.

Whether alone with her husband on piano or interacting with guests such as Norman Moses, she managed to keep focused and funny when it mattered, a testimony to her talent and strength as a performer.

Paula was not alone though. That talent and strength was shared by the entire cast, whether by Colin mastering through score after score on the piano or guests lending their voices to support the *Skylight*.

Everyone on stage, even the mysterious tap-dancing woman who stole the stage with Paula for about two minutes before subsequently disappearing, helped create a variety-show style history lesson that kept the audience engaged and laughing.

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