

## Theater

### Willkommen, bienvenue...

Traditional cabaret gets a spin on the turntables this month. By **Katherine Rust**

Hip-hop may conjure images of quick-talking rappers or high-flipping break-dancers, rather than artists performing on stage before an audience. But this month, for the sixth year in a row, the Castillo Theatre in midtown hosts the All Stars Project Hip-Hop Cabaret, a unique collection of live rap, dance and music that eschews the genre's stereotype.

A nonprofit organization dedicated to introducing underprivileged kids to the arts, the All Stars Project regularly produces live programs throughout the city featuring its theater group (called Youth On Stage) or, in citywide talent shows (All Stars Talent Show Network), kids who take the stage to perform variety of acts.

The divisions unite for an evening of acts by some of the best local kid performers, in "a theater form that brings together the European political Cabaret tradition with the energy and creativity of hip-hop" says Youth On Stage artistic director Dan Friedman. He says that the ultimate goal of the show is to offer disadvantaged kids ages eight and up a welcoming place where they can express themselves in original ways. "The challenge is to create a unified piece of theater," he says. "It's not a play in the sense that it has a story or certain characters, but it weaves together themes that are important to the kids and allows them to generate new songs, raps and dances."

It might not be as intense as the exploration of Nazism that holds together Kandler and Ebb's Broadway musical *Cabaret*, but past themes if the hip-hop iteration have addressed a range of issues: the war in Iraq (a rap group performed a piece from the perspective of a soldier from Brooklyn); and the plight of a female being harassed on the streets by a thug (in "Girl Holler," a group taunted guys in the same crude ways they are hassled daily.)



You're welcome Life is a cabaret this month for some of the city's talented teens.

This year the group consists of 11 kids from all over the city, and other than the revelation that DJ Tommy Lee will be performing onstage between acts—in the same way small bands once did in European Cabaret—the show's lineup will remain unannounced until opening night. It's a collaborative effort in the truest sense, and one that should yield an impressive display of young talent. Moreover, the show will reflect the myriad concerns and experiences of New York City youth. "The kids come from different places in life," says cocreator Antoine Joyce, former national producer of the Talent Show Network, adding that they bring those diverse, often rough experiences into the process of creating the show. The cabarets are well attended by the performers' peers and families, as well as regular attendees of the Castillo Theatre and an ever-growing new audience. As Friedman notes: "I don't see many other places where you'll find middle-class white adults enjoying a hip-hop show."

*All Stars Project Hip-Hop Cabaret runs June 1-16 at the Castillo Theatre. For more information, see Weekly Calendar.*