

Interview: Brown Paper Box Co.’s ‘Positively Present’ Cabaret on Apr. 7-8, 2017

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 4, 2017 - 5:49pm

- [Andersonville](#) [2]
- [Anna Schutz](#) [3]
- [Brown Paper Box Co.](#) [4]
- [Cabaret](#) [5]
- [Chicago](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Interview](#) [8]
- [Kristen Chenoweth](#) [9]
- [Kristi Szczepanek](#) [10]
- [M. William Panek](#) [11]
- [Mary’s Attic](#) [12]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [13]
- [Positively Present: An Uplifting Cabaret](#) [14]
- [They’re Playing Our Song](#) [15]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [16]

CHICAGO – When faced with adversity, the best way around it is to somehow break into song. That is the feeling behind the Brown Paper Box Co.’s “Positively Present: An Uplifting Cabaret,” running April 7th and 8th at Mary’s Attic in Chicago’s Andersonville neighborhood. The event features company member Kristi Szczepanek as host, and presents song stylings by other company members, including Anna Schutz, plus some special guests. For details and ticket information, [click here](#). [17]



At Mary’s Attic in Chicago, April 7th & 8th, 2017
Photo credit: Brown Paper Box Co.

Based in Chicago, Brown Paper Box Co. creates challenging and inspiring theatre that focuses on the text itself. By employing a smart, simple aesthetic in intimate spaces, their desire is to get to the heart of the stories they are staging. Anna Schutz is the Managing Director of the Company, and Kristi Szczepanek is an Artistic Associate, besides their participation as songstresses. They talked to HollywoodChicago.com in anticipation of “Positively Present: An Uplifting Cabaret.”

HollywoodChicago.com: The presentation of this song/cabaret show is about achieving balance in the face of these strange and adversarial times. In your opinion, how does creative expression act as a balm for emotional or moral imbalance?



Kristi Szczepanek
Photo credit: Brown Paper Box Co.

Kristi Szczepanek: For me, I find that creative expression helps me work through a feeling I'm having about a situation, particularly when I'm feeling stuck and can't get over something. My initial reaction might be anger, but as I work through a song or practice an instrument, I realize that what I'm actually feeling is sadness or fear. I find that being creative helps you get at the root of whatever your feeling and helps you to treat the cause and not just a symptom. There's a reason why break-up songs exist. [laughs]

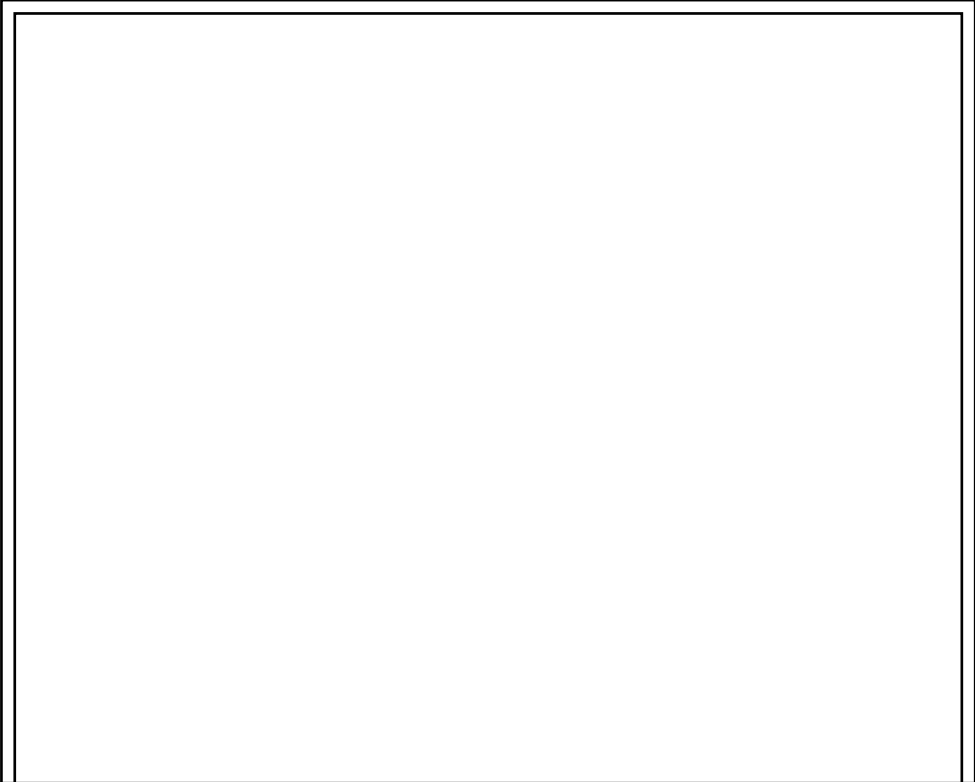
HollywoodChicago.com: Anna, you're a belter as a songstress, in the tradition of Liza Minnelli. How do you think your style of singing communicates a song differently than other styles?

Anna Schutz: There is something risky and raw about a good old fashioned belt. You cannot second guess yourself or you can get yourself into trouble – you have to commit, breathe, and let go in order to stick the landing. When I watch a great belter, I'm instantly connected to their performance, and I'm breathing with them in the moment. With the more subtle and classic styles, the performances invite you to lean in... but a Broadway-type belter grabs you by the collar and takes you along for the ride.

HollywoodChicago.com: Kristi, what are some of the songs that will be sung, and how did you and your fellow singers pick the correct ones for the theme?

Szczepanek: There will be songs from well-known musicals like 'Into the Woods' and 'The Last Five Years' but there's also Frank Sinatra, Florence and the Machine and even a Beyonce/Michael Jackson mashup that I'm particularly excited about. As people were picking their songs, I asked them to think about where they are in this present moment – what song best captures wherever you are in life right now? We're all experiencing life differently, and I think the song choices reflect that.

HollywoodChicago.com: Anna, if you have a moment to yourself, and start surfing YouTube for either music or old video of performance, what is the go-to that puts you in good groove and why?





Anna Schutz

Photo credit: Brown Paper Box Co.

Schutz: It's Kristin Chenoweth singing 'Glitter and Be Gay' from the musical 'Candide' – her control and technique are unbelievable. That song is perhaps the most difficult song to sing in musical theatre and not only does she sing it flawlessly, she makes bold choices and tells a story. It's really a master class in vocal performance, and it's a lot of fun to watch.

HollywoodChicago.com: But you've done a few show-stoppers yourself, including the Broadway standard 'Cabaret.' What is the key line in the song for you, and what does it mean to you personally?

Schutz: First off, that song is very complicated in the context of the show – it has be interpreted and performed in many different ways. For me, just as a stand alone song, the last line 'And I love a Cabaret' is the most interesting. The character of Sally is speaking about the ups and downs of life, and that life is short. So no matter the difficulties, live that life and love it to the fullest.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, Kristi, since you are the host, what would be your one paragraph pitch be if you were trying to convince a fellow traveler worried about the state of the country to come to the show?

Szczepanek: With so much changing in our country – seemingly by the hour – trying to keep up can feel overwhelming and disheartening. It's important to disconnect and take some time out to put your focus elsewhere for a little while. 'Positively Present' will be an evening full of great vibes and great music. Hopefully, you will leave feeling refreshed, refocused and ready to tackle whatever comes next.

Brown Paper Box Co. presents "Positively Present: An Uplifting Cabaret" on April 7th and 8th, 2017 (7:30pm), at Mary's Attic, 5400 North Clark Street, Chicago. For information on Brown Paper Box Co., and their upcoming shows [click here](#). [17]



[18]

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/anna-schutz>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brown-paper-box-co>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/cabaret>
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