

Viva Pablo Neruda: A Celebration



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New York City is full of culture and excitement. Over the weekend, *My Life with Pablo Neruda*, a Pocket Opera-Cabaret that is compelling, intense, and seductive, was celebrated by an evening of Chilean wine and performances. Performed at the Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center (<http://www.csvcenter.org/>) and presented by **Voice Afire** (<http://voiceafire.com/>), the event celebrated Pablo Neruda, a Chilean social activist who was one of the greatest poets of the 20th century and the basis for the show. The evening began with a wine tasting, followed by a special live performance showcasing scenes from *My Life with Pablo Neruda*, which is based on and inspired by his popular poetry collection, *100 Love Sonnets*. The evening served as a fundraiser for the production of the show.

An array of red and white Chilean wines were donated by **The Wines of Chile** (<http://www.winesofchile.org/>) for the event. The tasting was more of a “help yourself,” which made it very enjoyable and easy to socialize with the crowd that came to see the performance. The room was dark with red lighting and a few spotlights—very cool, calm, and collected.



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Pablo loved women...*many* women, and you could really capture who he was throughout the entire performance. **Rob Reese**, the director, is a New York based playwright and improv instructor whose work is well known on four continents. This story features two actors, two dancers, and a pianist. The male lead, **Paul Bellantoni**, represented Pablo and was vocally very strong, dominant, and proud to play the role of such a powerful man. Matilda, who was Pablo's third wife, was played by **Lea McKenna-Sanchez**. She was very seductive, strong, and played an excellent role while captivating the audience. They told their story of love, lust, Pablo's career, and the struggles that they faced. The play is a story of the remarkable journey of a woman, only interested in her home and garden, love stricken by Pablo Neruda and his power, passion, and knowledge. Based on the poetry of Pablo Neruda and Matilda's memories, this pocket opera can be seen as portraying one of the greatest love stories of the past century. The poetry is gripping, exciting, passionate, and yet full of such emotion that it takes the audience inside their world and the atmosphere surrounding them at the time the poems were written.

There were also two opera singers—a man and a woman. Throughout the sonnets, they would perform their opera sections with such beauty, that even if one was not an opera fan, it pulled you in and kept you captivated. **Kacey Cardin** is undeniably artistic and can bring an entire room to their feet with her stunning vocals. She is a cast member of the National Tour of Off-Broadway production, *Girls Night*. The male opera role was sung by **Jovier Sanchez**, whose voice was deep, riveting, and commanding. He is a singer specializing in classical and Off-Broadway genres.



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Additionally, there was a small dance performance of the Widower's Tango, performed by **Beth Lewis** and **Derek Stratton**. It was full of passion and desire and the dancers seemed to be totally immersed in the dance and in each other. Their performance was beautifully done and, like the wonderful Chilean wines served, completed the evening. The accompanying pianist was **Geraldine Boyey-Cussac**, a successful NYC based music director, pianist, and vocal coach.

The evening ended with more wine and a meet and greet of the performers. Rob Reese has been working on this pocket opera for quite some time and wants this story to be on Off-Broadway in 2014, which the audience seemed to look forward to, as well. They have set up a Kickstarter Campaign, which allows the public to contribute to help this production get to the next level. If you want to see this production on off-Broadway, the public is encouraged to donate as you will not want to miss this! Go to the website: <http://kck.st/ZtchsX> (<http://kck.st/ZtchsX>).

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