

The Letter – A Cabaret Musical

Book, Lyrics & Music by Deborah Henson-Conant

The Letter: A one-woman cabaret musical about a nightclub singer, her lover and his wife – three people entwined in a single fantasy of passion.

In 1840, Robert Schumann wrote the song cycle “Frauenliebe und Leben” (*A Woman’s Life And Love*) – a woman tells the story of first meeting her love, through their marriage, to his death. “The Letter” is a modern-day version of Schumann’s classic. This time the woman is a nightclub singer. The man is a married businessman. And the outcome is significantly different.

Synopsis

What if you fell desperately in love with a married man? He enchanted your life, but you knew it was wrong for you, for him, his wife, his children. For months you struggled to break it off and finally succeeded. Then, one year later you get a letter.

“So it’s from William,” is the first line of “The Letter,” a one-woman Cabaret Musical by Deborah Henson-Conant – and from there, the liaison between Madeleine, a nightclub singer, and William, a businessman, unfolds through a suite of songs and monologues.

As she stands in a small cabaret, holding the unopened envelope, Madeleine relives the trajectory of their romance from the night they met, to the moment he walked out of her life. She describes the magic of their first meeting (“Same Old Story”), waiting for his visits (“Anticipation Tango”), her obsession with his family (“How is Your Wife?”), his growing predictability (“Clockwork”) and her attempts to let him go (“Where Did All the Lonely Nights Go, Darling?”).

In the final song, “Maybe Someday,” Madeleine struggles between aching hope and fierce realism. If she opens the envelope, she reopens her heart to a passion that’s artistically stimulating, but destroys the lives of others.

Finally she decides. As the song ends, she places the unopened letter aside – and as she does, we realize the woman telling this story isn’t Madeleine, but William’s wife Jenny. The whole love affair is a fantasy from the mind of a woman desperate to discover passion and romance in her own husband. This letter could be to a lover – or to the dentist. Jenny has no idea, but it’s become the catalyst for her fantasy that William is secretly as romantic as she dreams he is. As she reprises “Maybe Someday,” we hear it as Jenny hunger for the moment she and William find their own romance.

Performers / Characters

The Letter can be performed as:

- A one-woman cabaret show (45 – 60 min) for soprano or mezzo-soprano
- A concert song cycle (25-30 minutes) for soprano
- A two-person cabaret musical (90-120 min) – one soprano, one mezzo

Original version is a one-woman show (mezzo or soprano) with one singer performing all three characters: Madeleine, William and Jenny

Musical Numbers

- The Letter / William
- Same Old Story
- Anticipation Tango
- How is Your Wife?
- Clockwork
- Where Did All the Lonely Nights Go, Darling?
- Maybe Someday

Alternate Musical Numbers

- Give Me a Band
- Finding My Love Somewhere Else
- When I was But Ten
- Take it Easy
- The Way You Looked

Additional Musical Numbers By Gunnar Madsen

- We
- There it Is
- Shouldn't Have
- Dancin' at Tibolis (by Madsen and Henson-Conant)

Instrumentation

- Originally for piano; but expandable for piano, bass, drums & sax

Scenes, Sets, Lighting & Special Effects

All scenes take place in a small cabaret (sketches available). "The Letter" can also be performed with minimal staging, or concert-style with no staging.

Standard theater lighting; concert version performable with basic concert lighting

Period & Costumes

This could take place any time from the 1920's to the present.

Choreography

Choreography optional

Alternate Versions

- Two-character version is for soprano and mezzo-soprano roles
- Song Cycle concert version omits dialogue and includes only the basic songs

Discography

- "How is Your Wife?" recorded 1983 by Meredith d'Ambrosio on "Little Jazz Bird"

Graphics & Illustrations

Set Design sketches (PDFs) at http://www.hipharp.com/cv/musicals/letter/letter_the_fnt.html