



The title of David Baida's debut cabaret show, now on view at the Metropolitan Room, is Unexpected Surprise. Anyone who saw his work during last summer's MetroStar Talent Challenge – which he won – will not be at all surprised that this show (directed by Adolpho Blaire) is clever, funny, inventive, and very entertaining. In addition, he has a robust and beautiful tenor voice, so the show is also filled with fine singing; I mention this quality last not to diminish it, but because a fair number of other performers can also sing well technically, but not many are able to blend songs, anecdotes, and interjections so creatively and appealingly.

The outline of this autobiographical show may sound rather humdrum – like hundreds, nay, thousands of other shows: growing up in a small town in California, going through adolescence, crushes and romantic relationships, moving to New York, auditioning, landing on Broadway. (I take that back just a little: being cast on Broadway can never be categorized as humdrum.) In other hands, this storyline might, indeed, have been banal, but here we have Baida's humor, charm, idiosyncratic perspective, and crackerjack delivery, and through it all, his sparkle and playfulness.

In addition to being quite funny, his patter sets up the musical numbers especially well; indeed, the setups and the songs form organic wholes. A sweet anecdote about being an overweight child is wed to a sweet and funny song, "Little Fat Boys" (James Quinn, Alaric Jans). He reveals that at age fourteen he became enamored of a handsome movie star; this leads to "Swept Away" (Christopher Cross, Stephen Dorff, John Bettis), a heartfelt musical expression of adoration. And when he tells of his adolescent resolve to make a life for himself in New York that is fashioned after the star's life, we get the quintessential outsider's song "Stranger in This World" (Boy George, Kevan Frost, John Themis, Richie Stevens), performed dramatically as both declaration and plea. Landing his first professional musical show is the inspiration for a fearless performance of Dan Goggin's "The Fifth from the Right," complete with a go-for-it dance break and a mock big ending.

While the show's title may be redundant (can a surprise be anything but unexpected?), there is an aspect of the enterprise that is unexpected: Baida often uses songs in contexts that are quite different from their original or usual settings or referents. Though it's been the target of comic onslaughts (most notably Spike Jones's iconic insane version), "Cocktails for Two" (Arthur Johnson, Sam Coslow) is traditionally a lilting or swinging romantic number. Here, the setting is changed to the crew bar on one of the cruise ships on which Baida has performed, and the number is sprinkled with modern allusions, mounting bibulousness, and considerable hilarity; it's marvelous. Cole Porter's "Just One of Those Things" refers to the end of a love affair; Baida's interpretation, though, is not about a relationship between two people, but about the end of something that is also deeply personal – and the effect is equally poignant. Written years before the advent of the World Wide Web, "Take a Chance" (David Foster, Steven Lukather, Olivia Newton-John) may not be a very interesting song, but moving it forward a couple of decades, Baida relates it to online dating and makes it succeed. "Very Good Advice" (Sammy Fain, Bob Hilliard, from Alice in Wonderland) is also not very interesting – at least not outside its original context – and is the only selection that Baida hasn't made work, though his few interjections hint at what he might be able to do with the song.

From beginning to end, he gets admirable support from musical director Yasuhiko Fukuoka on piano, Marco Panascia on bass, and Simon Fishburn on drums.