

Sara Melissa Hart Biography



Sara Melissa Hart - Class of 1960 - 4/16/1942 is an American actress, singer, and teacher. She made her Broadway debut in 1966 as an ensemble member in Jerry Bock's *The Apple Tree*. As Barbara Harris's understudy, she replaced the actress as the various heroines in that musical for several performances. In 1969 she took over the role of Sally Bowles in the original production of John Kander's *Cabaret*; a role she had previously performed in the musical's first National Tour. In 1970 she created the role of Meredith in the original Broadway cast of Tom Mankiewicz's *Georgy*; a performance for which she garnered a Tony Award nomination. She soon after performed the role of Fran Kubelik in the National Tour of Burt Bacharach's *Promises, Promises*.

During the 1970's and 1980's, Hart was highly active in Regional Theatres throughout the United States and in Off-Broadway productions. She won a Joseph Jefferson Award for her portrayal of

Amy in Stephen Sondheim's *Company* at the Forum Theatre in Chicago. After a 27 year absence from Broadway, she returned to portray Baroness Von Thunder and serve as the Understudy for the Old Lady in the 1997 revival of Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*. Later that year she performed the role of Helene in the original cast of Frank Wildhorn's *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

Hart began her professional education at the University of Illinois where she was a voice major. She transferred to Northwestern University where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre. She later pursued graduate studies in acting and directing at Florida Atlantic University where she earned a Master of Fine Arts. In New York City she studied voice with Ellen Faull. She also studied singing with Richard Miller and speech language vocology and vocal health training with Anat Keidar. She has served on the theatre faculties of Florida Atlantic University (1983, 1986), University of Florida (1990–1994), Pennsylvania State University (1994–1996), and Marymount Manhattan College (1996–2008). She has also taught masterclasses and workshops at numerous institutions, including the Baltimore School for the Arts, the Governor's School for the Arts (Kentucky), the Interlochen Center for the Arts, the University of Miami, the University of Oklahoma, the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, and at the National Convention of the National Association of Teachers of Singing among others. She currently teaches at the Saint Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists.

To learn the ins and outs of Sally Bowles in Frank Theatre's new production of *Cabaret*, Sara Richardson had an expert in the cast she could turn to for advice. Melissa Hart, who plays Frau Schneider here, performed on Broadway and on tour as Bowles in Hal Prince's original 1960's production.

For Hart, it's a way to come full circle on a career that has included performing and teaching throughout the country and now continues at the Minnesota Centennial Showboat, where *Cabaret* will play through March.

Hart first worked with Frank director Wendy Knox in 2007 in the Ordway's production of *The Sound of Music*. "I was looking for a new adventure. I had done what I had wanted to do in New York." So the trip to St. Paul was a test run of sorts, and Hart found that she enjoyed the area, and also enjoyed working with Knox.

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After she and her husband relocated to the capitol city, Knox began teaching and working again with Knox. This time, it was in a Frank production, *By the Bog of Cats*. “I was struck by her technique,” Hart says, noting that when putting a musical on its feet, Knox is as likely to direct from the book as the score. She also involves the entire cast in the decision-making process.

“I found it unsettling that someone else could comment on ‘my’ scene, but I found that if I just kept saying ‘yes’ and opening myself to suggestions that I learned so much more about the character and the scene. The whole cast is really owning the show,” Hart says.

On the surface, *Cabaret* doesn’t seem to fit Frank’s usual fair, which often tackles difficult subjects like the Liberian civil war (last year’s *Eclipsed*) and authors such as Franz Kafka and Bertolt Brecht. Still, if you scratch the surface of the musical you can find a beating, dark heart. *Cabaret* features legendary contributions by John Kander and Fred Ebb and is drawn from Christopher Isherwood’s memoirs of time spent in Weimar Germany before the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. In typical fashion, Knox has done considerable research into the time and place for the cast to use, which Hart has used and appreciated while creating her character.

All of the hard work by the cast (which also includes Bradley Greenwald as the Emcee, Patrick Bailey as Herr Schultz, and Max Wojtanowicz as Cliff) and crew (Hart shares the music director job with Michael Croswell) has turned this *Cabaret* into something that Hart--who has performed in the show hundreds upon hundreds of times through the years--has not quite seen before.

The approach to the material, the movement, and show’s concept has all caused a shift. “This is becoming more a play with music,” Hart says.