

# CABARET SCENES

News & Listings Incorporating Musical Theater November 2008 \$4.00 USA

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## Tracks

HILARY ANN FELDMAN

**Taking Flight**  
(AOK Records)

Sincerity and ebullience in abundance: that's what we clearly have in clear-voiced Hilary Ann Feldman's debut album. A refreshing *joie de vivre* and welcome unpretentious attitude dominate her youthful sound, persona and style. Being blasé, bitter, bitchy or brash—she doesn't take those avenues and seemingly wouldn't want them on her road map. She lives on the sunny side of the



street. Anything but stuffy or guarded, the Chicago-based vocalist and leader of Acts Of Kindness Cabaret (AOK)—an organization of singers and others who donate their talents for charity events—has an approach to her singing and song choices that projects warmth and caring.

Feldman mixes pop, folk and standards in her set list, even adding lyrics of her own invention to the list of inventions and innovations to update the Gershwins' old "They All Laughed." On some tracks, she has a distracting habit of breaking the flow of the music and suddenly speaking occasional words or phrases, for effect. Though it's a personal choice (and it's not done to "cheat" musically to avoid singing certain notes), this usually works better when performing live. There are some musical and dramatic leaps that feel labored or self-conscious, but there's a great deal to admire and enjoy, too. Anchored by the solid, wise but unobtrusive work of musical director/pianist Beckie Menzie, a small band accompanies. *Taking Flight* has an in-flight menu of songs that tend to land in the land of mega-cheer or its opposite: unblinking earnestness, with very little in between. Unlike most singers' repertoires, romantic relationships are not the main agenda. A focus on life philosophy and self-empowerment is more prominent; and Feldman is especially convincing on Judy Collins' assurance that you can live "The Life You Dream." It's a life-affirming atmosphere into which Hilary Ann Feldman stays in flight.

— Rob Lester