**SALEM’S FALL AT THE FORT**

**OPENS TENTH SEASON**

SALEM, NY — Fort Salem Theater opens its tenth Fall at the Fort Cabaret Festival on Saturday, November 5 at 8 PM, with musical theater leading lady Melissa Cook starring in “*Taking the Lead.”* Miss Cook will be joined by singer Tim Nelson for some powerhouse musical theater duets.

From performing as a teen in the 1992 Super Bowl halftime show with Michael Jackson, singing and touring with the Young Americans, to being lead classical vocalist for Silversea World Cruises, California native Melissa Cook has distinguished herself as a virtuoso vocalist throughout the world. For several years she ran the Curtain Call Dinner Theater in Tustin, California, moonlighting at The Rose Center Theater in Westminster, California. Rose Center’s artistic director, Tim Nelson, moonlights as a director once a year at Fort Salem Theater, where Miss Cook has been featured in lead roles in *“Brigadoon,” “Man of La Mancha,” “Carousel,” “Into the Woods,”* and this year’s *“The Sound of Music.”*

By happy coincidence, Melissa has relocated to Troy, and brings her leading lady skills to inaugurate the Fort’s tenth season of Fall cabarets. In *“Taking the Lead,”* she will be joined in several duets by her Rose Center colleague Tim Nelson, who created and performed the cabaret with her on a Silversea Grand Voyage. Nelson, an award-winning teacher and musical director, splits his time between administering the Rose Center, heading the Musical Theater department at the Huntington Beach (CA) School of the Performing Arts, and directing at Fort Salem and Albany’s Park Playhouse. Together they will leave no great theater song unsung in their Fort cabaret debut.

Since opening in July, 2007, with Broadway star Neva Small in *“Not Just an Ingenue,”* which went on to an off-Broadway run, The Cabaret at Fort Salem Theater has showcased Broadway performers including Bill Carmichael, Tom Flagg, Anita Gillette, Teri Ralston, and Mary Stout. Television’s Singing Anchors, formed at the cabaret in 2009 with Benita Zahn, Jerry Gretzinger, and Jessica Layton, have gone on to perform throughout the Capital Region. Young embryonic star performers have moved on to Broadway. When local audience members step into the renovated 1882 chapel attached to the renovated 1832 Presbyterian Church that is now Fort Salem Theater, they are transformed into an equally spiritual world of muse-inspired performances by talented and skilled artists.

As Melissa Cook takes the lead on November 5, the Fort’s decade-long cabaret tradition is in the best of hands. Doors open at 7:30 PM for an 8 PM curtain. Coffee and dessert are served with the $25 ticket. Because seating is limited by law, reservations are required. More information is available online ([fortsalemtheater.com](http://fortsalemtheater.com)) or by calling the theater’s box office at (518) 854-9200.