

# 'S.W.O.N. Songs' is really an ugly duckling

By ARTHUR FRIEDMAN

"S.W.O.N. Songs: A 1940s Homefront Cabaret." Written and Directed by Ron Jenkins. Musical direction by Brad Ellis. At Charlestown Working Theater, 442 Burker Hill St., Charlestown. Through May 21.

"S.W.O.N. Songs: A 1940s Homefront Cabaret" is based in part on the oral histories of the women who worked in the Charlestown Navy Yard during World War II. When the actors step out of character to recite these women's actual monologues, they (both actors and speeches) move us.

But "S.W.O.N. Songs" is mainly the work of writer Ron Jenkins, whose poor excuse for a script follows the fortunes of a group of

Shipbuilding Women of the Navy (S.W.O.N.s). There's Ginger, the movie-struck hairdresser; Helen, who aspires to Electrician-First-Class status; and Ethel, a worldly-wise black woman with few stars in her eyes.

Nothing much happens to these Assembly Line Annies: they trade patriotic slogans, they stage a workclothes fashion show, they form a singing group, they worry about the boys at the front.

That they are stereotypes goes without saying. That they are uninteresting stereotypes is Jenkins' fault: His inane script offers neither a coherent plot, coherent characters nor a coherent parody (if that's his game); and the show's 20 songs serve merely as decoration.

Jenkins touches on some potentially interesting themes: The effect of the mass media and popular culture on defining these wo-

men's values; the first stirrings of the equal rights movement for blacks and women. But "S.W.O.N. Songs" is too sketchy to bear the weight of Jenkins' attempts at seriousness; so they seem sentimental, clumsy, and pretentious.

The performers are far livelier than their material. I liked Kathy St. George as Ginger (she has a pleasant trace of the young Judy Garland), Kathryn Woods as Ethel (though she cries too much,

which is out of character for the tough, no-nonsense welder), and Sally Schwager as the aspiring Helen. They'd all be better off in a better show.

Two of Boston's most gifted cabaret artists, Bobbie Steinbach and Jodi Capeless, are wasted in the undemanding roles of radio performers and plant managers.

With such a squandering of talent, no wonder "S.W.O.N. Songs" takes a S.W.O.N. dive.

## Fellow singers call him 'God'

From Page 31

hard for a big record company that's geared to sell records in K-Mart to figure out what to do with an esoteric guy like me."

What makes this record different from his previous albums?

Clark chuckles. "I got to pay for it myself," he says. "And I got to produce and do the whole thing myself. I didn't have any pressure on me except to do what I chose, so I took my time and made the record I always wanted to make. It's a real acoustic approach. There's no drums, no big band. It's living room music."

Now Clark, 47, is taking his songs out of the living room and putting them on the road. He's opening for another Texan, Nanci Griffith, at two sold-out shows at Berklee on Saturday. Don't despair. Just drive out to Northampton on Friday and see him perform at the Iron Horse with Townes Van Zandt.

Van Zandt is yet another Texan. He doesn't have much of a voice, but he's one helluva songwriter. ...

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**"A MAGICAL AND MOVING RIDE."**  
—David Aron, NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE

**KEVIN COSTNER**  
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—Jeff Craig, SIXTY SECOND PREVIEW

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<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>HEATHERS</b> *12:45-3:00-5:00-7:30-9:30	<b>SAY ANYTHING</b> *1:00-3:15-5:15-7:45-10:00
<b>BARON MUNCHHAUSEN</b> *10:45-1:35-4:15-7:10-10:00	<b>NEW YORK STORIES</b> *12:30-3:00-5:30-8:00-10:20	<b>MAJOR LEAGUE</b> *1:30-3:30-5:30-7:30-9:30
<b>FIELD OF DREAMS</b> *11:00-1:45-4:30-7:15-9:45	<b>HIGH HOPES</b> *12:45-3:00-5:15-7:25-9:40	<b>CHARLES</b> CAMEL ST. 509-1014
<b>SEE YOU IN THE MORNING</b> *11:15-2:00-4:35-7:00-9:30	<b>WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN</b> *1:00-2:50-5:00-7:15-9:15	<b>K-9</b> *12:45-2:50-5:00-7:20-9:40
<b>SHE'S OUT OF CONTROL</b> *10:00-12:15-2:30-4:50-9:20	<b>RAINMAN</b> *10:15-12:40-2:30-7:30-10:10	<b>LAWRENCE OF ARABIA</b> 1:30-7:30
<b>PARENTS</b> *1:40-3:40-5:40-8:50	<b>WORKING GIRL</b> *10:00-12:30-3:00-5:30-8:00-10:20	<b>BEACON HILL</b> 100 WASHINGTON ST. 266-1300
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:10-3:15-5:15-7:30-9:35	<b>K-9</b> *12:40-3:05-5:25-7:40-9:50	<b>JACKNIFE</b> *1:15-3:20-5:20-7:20-9:20
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>PET SEMATARY</b> *12:30-2:40-4:50-7:20-9:30	<b>REDSCORPION</b> *1:15-3:10-5:10-7:10-9:10
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:50-2:50-4:55	<b>I'M GONNA GIT YOU SUCKA</b> *1:30-3:30-5:30-7:30-9:30
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>SHE'S OUT OF CONTROL</b> *1:00-3:00-5:00-7:10-9:20	<b>CINEMA 57</b> 200 ST. ANNE ST. 482-1222
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>RAINMAN</b> 7:00-9:40	<b>HORROR SHOW</b> *1:00-3:00-5:00-7:15-9:30
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>PET SEMATARY</b> *1:30-3:30-5:45-7:45-10:00
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>PARIS</b> 841 NORTON ST. 599-1310
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>DANGEROUS LIAISONS</b> *1:00-3:15-5:30-7:45-10:00
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>DANVERS</b> 100 WASHINGTON ST. 266-1300
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>SEE YOU IN THE MORNING</b> *1:00-3:10-5:15-7:30-9:50
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>SHE'S OUT OF CONTROL</b> *1:30-3:30-5:20-7:20-9:30
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>SAY ANYTHING</b> *1:30-3:30-5:30-7:30-9:40
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>DREAM TEAM</b> *1:00-3:15-5:35-7:50-10:15
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>MAJOR LEAGUE</b> *1:10-3:15-5:20-7:45-10:00
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>RAINMAN</b> *1:30-4:30-7:15-10:00
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>DANVERS LTM</b> 100 WASHINGTON ST. 266-1300
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<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>HORRORSHOW</b> *5:10-7:40-9:40
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>SALEM</b> 100 WASHINGTON ST. 266-1300
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<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>SCANDAL</b> *5:15-7:30-9:30
<b>LOVERBOY</b> *1:15-3:30-5:50-8:15-10:30	<b>LOVERBOY</b> *12:40-2:40-4:40-6:40-8:40	<b>SPEED ZONE</b> *5:00-7:20-9:20