



Lyne Tremblay of Cabaret Deco doing her Liza Minelli impression for the SSO fundraiser at Carlu.

Schizophrenia cuts the attention deficit

Research for a cure now has energetic and savvy advocates



Gillian Cosgrove

Schizophrenia is not a fashionable, feel good cause, like breast cancer or AIDS. It has no celebrity

spokespeople. It has suffered from a Dickensian "let's-keep-them-in-the-closet" stigma. Until now. The organizers of the first annual Iris Ball have just pulled off a spectacular fundraising gala with panache and sass. The ball, the new logo (the iris) and new slogan ("A reason to hope. The means to cope") are part of a brave effort by the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario to re-brand and reach out beyond the 20,000 families it serves.

Judging by the elegance of the evening at art deco Carlu, the SSO has come along way from its humble beginnings in a church basement in Oakville 25 years ago. All too often I have suffered through interminable evenings of indifferent food and self-congratulatory blather. But the Iris Ball last Saturday was a treat. The highlight: a world class performance by Cabaret Deco, with husband and wife team John Evans and Lyne

Tremblay celebrating the decadent nightlife of the jazz era. This featured his wicked impersonation of Noel Coward (with a touch of Christopher Plummer at his most droll) and hers of Josephine Baker, Marlene Dietrich and Liza Minnelli in Cabaret. The Scott Marshall Zeitgeist Sextet jazz band was outstanding. Certainly, this is the best little show in Toronto in a long, long time.

Prominent in the blue-ribbon crowd were Camilla Dalglish, the philanthropist; her most-eligible-bachelor nephew, Garfield Mitchell, former head of the family's Weston foundation; Peter and Elsie Southam; Bob and Trudy Bundy; Martyn Weir, an organizer of the gala and his wife, Lynn Fletcher, the investment banker; and Len Wall, the hyper-active, hyper-caring president of the SSO. A no-show was George Smitherman, the bully boy (according to hospital workers) Health Minister. But behind the fun lurked the inescapable reality that schizophrenia is "youth's greatest disabler." It strikes between 17 and 25 when life holds its greatest promise. We all know someone who has lost a friend, a son or a daughter to schizophrenia because it

cuts a wide swath regardless of class. That doesn't make the individual stories any less heart-rending. Sarah Brooks, a beautiful brainy woman who loved fashion and travel, suddenly, at 25, became introspective, troubled and withdrawn. The disease attacked her so fiercely that she could not follow the treatment prescribed. Despairing of ever regaining her rewarding life, she made a choice to end it last year. In her memory, her gutsy parents, Martin and Kathy Brooks, have launched Sarah's Scarves, a program to knit and sell colourful scarves to raise money for the early detection and diagnosis of schizophrenia. Kenneth, son of Rosemary Makhan of Burlington's

son, died in his sleep at 25 from a severe medication interaction. To ease her pain and to raise money for education about schizophrenia, she has sewn a spectacular quilt, of the things her son loved best: frogs, woodland creatures and nature in all its glory. She has donated it to the SSG for auction. The loudest applause was for Jesse Bigalow, 26, "the strength and hope for our community." He got schizophrenia five years ago, spent six months in hospital and has gradually rebuilt his life. Now, he volunteers for Beyond the Cuckoo's Nest, a program teaching high school students about early

detection and intervention. In 2005, SSO will focus on detecting schizophrenia's "ignition point" in young people, because the earlier it is diagnosed and treated, the better the outcome. Doubt there's a need? Schizophrenia victims occupy more hospital beds than any other medical or surgical condition in Canada. The disease costs Canadians more than \$2.3-billion a year in health costs and another \$2-billion in support services. Yet research into the causes and the "cure is pitifully underfunded. Sadly, the only major corporate sponsors of the gala were foreign drug companies. Where are the Bay Street giants?