



Friday, October 15, 2007

## **Tuner fest sings 'Break Up' song Industry-only event serves as valuable marketplace**

By Gordon Cox

**The national draw of the 19-year-old Festival of New Musicals -- which this year brought in more than 700 commercial producers, regional theater reps and other legiters from around the country -- has made the event a valuable marketplace for new musicals.**

Fest alums include "The Drowsy Chaperone" and "Thoroughly Modern Millie." **Seven of last year's eight productions went on to further development**, with a musical incarnation of the play "Vanities" aiming for Broadway next season.

**"There is no other service organization that gets this many producers in one room at one time to see a piece,"** says Kent Nicholson of TheaterWorks in Silicon Valley.

Each year, NAMT offers eight new musicals in varying stages of development. For instance, Patricia Cotter and Lori Scarlett's "Break Up Notebook," the Go-Go's-flavored story of a year in the life of a just-dumped woman, has already had two California productions.

"NAMT helped us to validate our idea that it's a nationally commercial show that could play in New York and in the regionals," says "Break Up" producer Rose Marcario. She's hopeful an Off Broadway production will result from the Gotham showcase, adding she was pleasantly surprised by the amount of regional interest expressed as well.

Roy Miller, one of the producers of "Drowsy," and Jennifer Maloney have already set David Austin's "Writing Arthur" on its developmental course. The show was given a series of staged readings last year as well as a workshop at TheaterWorks.

The NAMT excerpt of "Arthur" featured more than 25 actors -- including Ana Gasteyer, Malcolm Gets and Kelli O'Hara -- and seven musicians. Miller says his main goals for the presentation were to gain a sense of how the musical, about a reclusive man torn between two women (one of whom is fictional), would sound with the large cast, as well as to give some national exposure to composer-lyricist-bookwriter-thesp Austin.

Miller is also on the lookout for a potential tryout home for the piece. **"At NAMT, we got some additional theaters interested that I would not have been able to garner on my own,"** he says.

Also in the diverse mix this year were the hip-hop-infused gang tale "Kingdom," the Southern period piece "Tinyard Hill" and an old-fashioned adaptation of "Casey at the Bat."

**NAMT pays most of the production expenses for the tuner showcases**, at a budget of about \$130,000 for the entire fest, according to NAMT exec director Kathy Evans.

*(over)*

"Story of my Life," a two-hander about a man grappling with writing his friend's eulogy, came in with no commercial producers attached. The showcase helped stir interest from a number of parties, says a rep for creators Neil Bartram and Brian Hill.

That's often how it works. **"On 'Drowsy,' after I did those two presentations, the phone rang off the hook," Miller says.**

With all the strike chatter emanating from the Left Coast, it's only natural to wonder how a potential work stoppage in Hollywood would affect Broadway.

But Rialto denizens -- when not worried about the possible shutdown spurred by contentious labor talks between legit producers and stagehands -- aren't bracing for a major upheaval should Los Angeles creatives strike.

Belt-tightening at talent agencies would probably result, and no department would be invulnerable. But the comparatively low-earning legit sectors already are relatively lean and mean.

And an agency's theater division could prove newly vital if a slew of top thespians find themselves, in the wake of a strike, with no film or TV projects to fill their skeds.

Legit, then, could provide a haven during the theoretical shutdown and the inevitable lag time before production restarts once the conflict is resolved.

In that case, some New Yorkers say, the biggest irritation would be the possibility of a bevy of big names agreeing to work on Broadway -- only to pull out as soon as a Hollywood strike is resolved.

n|a|m|t

NATIONAL ALLIANCE  
for MUSICAL THEATRE

*(over)*