

## TheatreZone delivers a one-man 'Beast' to G&L Theatre

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY



One of Al Hirschfeld's caricatures of David Merrick

David Garrison stars as Tony Awardwinning theatrical producer David Merrick in TheatreZone's world premiere of "The Beast of Broadway," opening Thursday, March 4, at G&L Theatre on the campus of Community School of Naples. Performances are at 8 p.m. March 4-6 and 10-13, and at 2 p.m. March 6, 7 and 14.

TheatreZone Artistic Director Mark Danni conceived the idea for the oneman play as a vehicle for Hal Linden, but the 78-year-old actor had a change of heart regarding the physical demands of the show that Mr. Danni hopes to take on tour in anticipation of a Broadway production.

As Mr. Linden's replacement, Mr. Garrison "is an ideal choice to play Merrick — a study in darkness with his tailored suits, sleek black hair, mustache, sardonic wit and low, insinuating voice," Mr. Danni says.



David Garrison

"David Merrick went out of his way to resemble a villain out of Victorian melodrama," he adds. "When Al Hirschfeld drew a particularly unflattering caricature of him as a Grinchlike Santa Claus, Mr. Merrick reproduced it on his annual Christmas card."

Although audiences at "The Beast of Broadway" might recognize Mr. Garrison's as Steve Rhoades on television's "Married with Children," the actor has spent his life in

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the theater. An accomplished Broadway actor, he most recently performed as the Wizard of Oz in “Wicked.”

Based in part on the best-selling book “The Abominable Showman” by Howard Kissell, “Beast of Broadway” writers Faye Greenberg (“High School Musical”) and Robert Freedman (TV’s “Cinderella”) bring Mr. Merrick’s story to the stage.

The play opens on April 25, 1980, with a scene from Mr. Merrick’s somewhat less-than-benign manipulation at the opening of “42nd Street.”

Gower Champion, the musical’s director and choreographer, had died early the day of the opening, at age 59, of a rare blood cancer. But Mr. Merrick kept the news secret so he could announce it from the stage at the curtain call, to the screams and tears of a devastated cast and first-night audience. While the show’s notoriety and success were assured, an ugly aftertaste lingered.

About the beast

Recipient of eight Tony Awards from nearly 100 Broadway shows in a career that spanned six decades, Mr. Merrick was admired, feared, detested and respected — but never ignored.

Born and raised in St. Louis, Mo., David Margulois graduated from Central High in 1930 and received a law degree from St. Louis University in 1937. With his sights on Broadway, he moved to New York in 1940 and changed his name to David Merrick. Building upon the success of 1954’s “Fanny,” he became the dominant Broadway producer of his era with hits such as “Gypsy,” “Hello Dolly” and the aforementioned “42nd Street.” Known for lavish musicals and outlandish publicity stunts, he also staged masterful productions of imported works such “Becket” and “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.”

About TheatreZone

TheatreZone is a nonprofit organization created by Mr. Danni and his wife, actress/choreographer Karen Molnar. The two share a vision and a passion to bringing the “Lost Treasures of Broadway and World Premieres” to Southwest Florida. TheatreZone employs professional actors who are members of the Actors Equity. All performances take place in the intimate, 250-seat G&L Theatre at Community School of Naples.

The final two 2010 season productions are Lee Roy Reams in concert with “Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance,” April 22-25, and “I Love My Wife,” June 10-20. For more information, call (888) 966-3352 (888) 966-3352, stop by the G&L Theatre Box Office between noon and 2 p.m. every Wednesday, or visit [www.theatrezoneflorida.com](http://www.theatrezoneflorida.com). •

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>> Where: "The Beast of Broadway," a world premiere by TheatreZone >> When:  
Select dates March 4-14 >> Where: G&L Theatre, Community School of Naples >>  
Tickets: \$38 and \$43 >> Box office: Open noon-2 p.m. every Wednesday >>  
Information: (888) 966-3352 (888) 966-3352 or [www.theatrezone-florida.com](http://www.theatrezone-florida.com)