

Friday, April 1, 2016

IN THE ZONE

■ TheatreZone announces its most unusual season yet

By Harriet Howard Heithaus
harriet.heithaus@naplesnews.com; 239-213-6091

Mark Danni, champion of offbeat musical theater in Naples, is mounting his most unusual yet in his 2016-17 season. It has no singing, no dancing and no Broadway orchestra.

In fact, he'll be looking for a harpsichord and a string quartet for this work.

It's "Amadeus," the fictional, frictional play detailing the rise of Mozart and the fall of his contemptuous fellow court composer, Antonio Salieri. The film version — also written by the playwright, Peter Shaffer ("Equus," "Lettice and Lovage") — became a hit, winning eight Oscars.

"Amadeus" (Feb. 9-19) is one of a four-work 2016-17 season with a bonus — a holiday show — announced by TheatreZone on Friday.

The others include:

■ "George M!": Jan. 12-22. The biographical musical of songwriter George M. Cohan's life is sort of a songbook musical rather than the current trend of jukebox shows. It's full of the writer-singer-dancer's most famous melodies, including "Give My Regards to Broadway," "Yankee Doodle Dandy," "Over There" and more. Danni remembers the musical as a production in the wrong place, wrong time, opening in 1968 during the height of the Vietnam War.

But the infectiousness of the tunes is indisputable, and it's a story about an extremely talented and hardworking Broadway legend, he said.

■ "9 to 5": March 9-19. The Dolly Parton-penned musical wasn't a huge Broadway hit, although it won three Tony awards. Danni said he and his wife, Karen, choreographer for the company, saw the musical on Broadway and "loved it. I thought it moved very well, and it was entertaining. Her music was fantastic. Every song was great."

■ "Legs Diamond Lives Again": April 27-May 7. This isn't the musical "Legs Diamond," which failed on Broadway. Writer Harvey Fierstein owns the book (script and staging) and won't release it, which Danni suggests diplomatically is probably in the play's best interest.

But a visit from Australian David Spicer, who owned the rights to "The Boy from Oz" and came to see it last season, revealed that he also holds rights to the "Legs Diamond" music. It was written by Peter Allen, who's music also figured in the biographical "The Boy from Oz."

Larry Alexander, who has figured in a good number of TheatreZone's productions ("Chess," "Brooklyn," "Company" and more) played the Peter Allen lead for "Oz." Danni would like to bring him back as a narrator, discussing the music and the circumstances around each song — in essence, creating their own book.

The bonus show is "Home for the Holidays," Dec. 9-11.

"It used to be we didn't start our season until January because of the school's schedule (TheatreZone's productions play in The Community School's G&L Theatre). But that has changed, so there's some availability in December, and after the response to our anniversary gala last year, we saw an opportunity for a holiday show," he said.

But not just any holiday show. Danni is working with tunes that he thinks are wonderful, but not as well known, through generations of seasonal music.

"There were some wonderful tunes that Petula Clark did in the '60s, and there are songs like 'Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree' that are a lot of fun," he said.

So he admits he has his summer planned: Burrow through music. Write a play book.

And find a harpsichord.

TO BUY

Tickets: Subscription tickets are on sale now at prices for three- or four-show series at \$165 and \$202. Tickets for "Home for the Holidays" are \$50. Individual tickets will go on sale June 1.

Tickets: 888-966-3352, ext. 5 or online at theatrezone-florida.com

