

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Co-producers count on new musical

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

TWO SUBURBANITES with show-business savvy are banking on "Shot Thru the Heart," the big new musical comedy at the Birmingham Theatre.

Alan N. Lichtenstein of Farmington Hills and Ivan S. Bloch of Birmingham are the men behind the show that's hopefully bound for Broadway.

Friday morning, the day after a migraine hit, Lichtenstein was back on his feet and talking about "Shot Thru the Heart." He said it's a \$3 million production, n'est-ce pas in the ballpark of Broadway shows, which range from \$2 million to \$5 million.

In a backstage dressing room at the Birmingham Theatre, a rack of old-fashioned costumes and tables strewn with theatrical makeup set the scene for a discussion of the show.

"Shot Thru the Heart" is described in the subscription brochure as "a musical thriller" about the Old West. Lichtenstein calls it a musical comedy, although it could be "a romantic, west-

ern musical comedy thriller," he acknowledged.

LICHTENSTEIN and Bloch are no starry-eyed angels in the world of entertainment. Originally from New Haven, Conn., Lichtenstein has made metro Detroit his home town. After putting together shows for Detroit's Music Hall Center, he began to do the same for Detroit's Masonic Temple. At present, he is director of theater operations at the Masonic Temple Theatre for the Nederlander Organization.

Bloch, a real-estate investor, has also been a theatrical entrepreneur with two Broadway hits to his credit — "Master Harold... and the Boys" and "Tintypes." Besides "Shot Thru the Heart," his shows in the works include the musical "Baby," which is opening on Broadway on Dec. 4, and "The Real Thing," a London hit he is bringing to America.

He has been hard to keep track of lately, flying back and forth to New York for "Baby" as well as being involved in the Birmingham production.

Bloch is not only a business associate

of Lichtenstein's, he is also a good friend. "He was best man at my wedding," Lichtenstein said. He added that Bloch was awarded the Peace Medal Thursday at Shazey Zedek in Southfield. "That's why I wasn't here (at the theater) last night," he said.

Lichtenstein was there the night before, for the first preview performance, as well as many nights before, putting all the elements of the show together.

"WE FEEL WE HAVE a show that's spectacular here," the soft-spoken Lichtenstein said. "The show is gorgeous."

He launched into a rundown of the talents working behind the scenes. The lighting designer (Dawn Chiang) has worked on "La Cage Aux Folles," the musical director (Nick Cerrato) on "Dreamgirls." The co-set designers (Lynn Pecktal and Robert Van Nutt) are pros.

He said that having co-set designers "is unique. We wanted a visual period look to the show. Robert Van Nutt, the artist, drew all the sets. Lynn Pecktal,

the designer, executed them. Van Nutt's wife, Julia, did all the costumes."

"Shot Thru the Heart" doesn't have any big stars in its cast, but all the performers have extensive backgrounds in entertainment. Alan Brasington, a stage and screen personality, plays Chauncey O. Truesdale, a thespian, and Liz Corrigan, who became famous as a folksinger, plays Jenney, a 40-year-old rancher in the west.

This is not a Broadway belt type of show," Lichtenstein stressed. "It's not a 'Hello, Dolly!' It's more like 'Evita.' It's American pop music, stylistic, with a folk-rock quality."

PAUL GIOVANNI, who wrote the book, music and lyrics, is directing the show. "Paul is one of the most brilliant men around," Lichtenstein said. "He just finished directing 'Amadeus' for the British National Tour, which was sold out everywhere. He's bringing 'Amadeus' to India and then back to London's West End."

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GARY CASKEY/staff photographer

Alan Lichtenstein's production of "Shot Thru the Heart" was only a dream 18 months ago. Today the show is a reality and having its premiere at the Birmingham Theatre. The co-producer talked about the musical backstage.

'Shot Thru the Heart' full of fun

Performances of the world-premiere production of the musical comedy "Shot Thru the Heart" continue through Dec. 18 at the Birmingham Theatre, 211 S. Woodward, Birmingham. For ticket information call the box office at 644-3533.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

You can't always tell the good guys from the varmints, the cowboys are not content with kissing their horses and the language gets saltier than the proverbial "Aw, shucks."

That's "Shot Thru the Heart," an adult musical western having its world premiere at the Birmingham Theatre. With a terrific cast and a delightful score, the show is rollicking good fun.

review

Set in 1887, the play opens with six strangers waiting at the stagecoach stop in Euphoria, a ghost town in the Badlands of the Southern Dakota territory. There's an itinerant actor fleeing a hostile audience, a frustrated cowpoke wanting to try the East, a schoolmarm heading for home, a dour housewife with an acid tongue and an overworked woman trying to escape from the tough old geezer she belongs to.

When a shipment of gold is ambushed and left abandoned after a bloody shoot-out, the six find instant

riches are theirs for the taking. Throwing in their lot together, they begin a six-day journey to cash in the gold. For some, it is a journey of self-discovery, for others a journey to betrayal.

THEIR ADVENTURES along the way, alternately amorous, dangerous and humorous, are the backdrop for Paul Giovanni's very pleasant music (Giovanni also wrote the book and lyrics as well as directing the production). Many of the songs have a country-and-western twang, and the most memorable numbers deal cynically with love, religion, greed and the American ethic.

As the cowardly, raging actor Chauncey Truesdale, Al Brasington is a comic gem whose expressive face alone is an endless source of glee.

Chauncey gains self-assurance when he poses as a Mormon preacher, riddling his gospel with such malapropisms as "ripe chestnuts" for "chickens."

Incongruously clad in a pilgrim suit left over from some long-ago performance, Brasington is dazzling as he breezes through "The Ten Commandments," a patter song in the manner of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Chauncey gives the commandments a whole new interpretation, such as urging people to "honor thy father and mother" so as to collect their life insurance.

WHILE EVERY one of the principals has a fine singing voice, Rhonda Coultel belts her numbers out with conviction.

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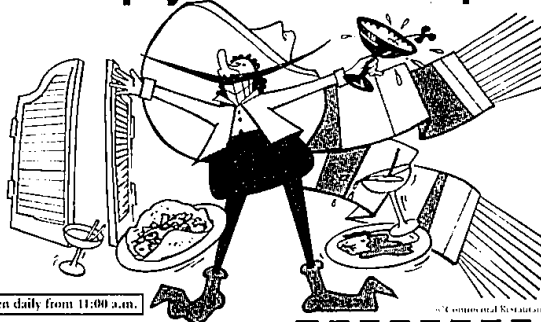
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