

Hills alum winning big-time praise for theatrical work

BY TRACY BIRKENHAUER
STAFF WRITER

At 39, Chip Meyrelles grew tired of being a real estate success stories lawyer. After 15 years of the cut-throat Los Angeles law business, the former Farmington Hills resident quit and started writing — a feat that landed him off-Broadway.



Chip Meyrelles

His wife, a former Architectural Digest editor, encouraged him to explore his artistic side. After some years, Meyrelles had written his first off-Broadway musical, "Stars in Your Eyes."

Unlike most writers, overlooking Meyrelles wrote the book, music and lyrics "frankly because I didn't know any better," he said. "I just started writing. In the future, I'll concentrate on the music and lyrics. In a certain way, it's nice to have a check and balance system."

"Stars in Your Eyes" opened Oct. 24, 1999, in New York's Cherry Lane Theatre. The show had critically acclaimed actors and a well-known director, Gabriel Barro, who also directed "Sweeney Todd" and "Finian's Rainbow."

Among the 200 packed in for opening night were about 10 of Meyrelles' Clarenceville High School classmates. His class of 1972 buddies were clearly impressed. "It's a pretty different kind of thing to do," he said, humbly. "Unless you're there in the theater every day, you don't understand it."

The crowd loved it, he said, offering a standing ovation. "Everyone should have that experience once in their lives," he said. "What was the best was the joyful celebration in all of it. I felt really supported by friends and family."

Meyrelles' musical is about people from the Midwest, with

Midwestern values. "It's what they call a soft play," he said. "It's a warm, cuddly kind of play — a tear-jerker in its own way."

It received mixed reviews. While some critics called it the best musical of the year, others panned it, calling it predictable and saccharin. "Everyone loved the actors," he said.

"Almost everyone loved the music and lyrics. Dialogue is the easiest to criticize. The New York Post hated it. They, like

many tabloids, say some vicious things. That's a different kind of experience. I don't place credible importance on reviews. The hipper agendas were more critical. Ironically, the further away from New York, the better the reviews got."

After three months, "Stars in Your Eyes" ended. Now it's touring the U.S. Currently, it's showing in Chicago and Raleigh, N.C.

Set in the 1962, "Stars in Your

Eyes" takes place soon after President John F. Kennedy announces a man will land on the moon by the end of the decade. Meyrelles said his show is set in an innocent time, back when Americans had idealistic views of the world. "We lost our innocence when Kennedy was shot," he said. "That changed everything. I wanted to take people back to that carefree time."

The seven-actor show is set in

two towns with familiar-sounding names, Milford and Bloomfield. The story includes two ordinary, middle-aged couples destined to be together. Naturally, some forces try to keep them apart. But love wins in the end, with some help from the Man in the Moon, who also narrates.

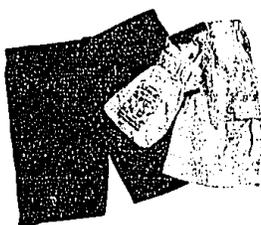
Meyrelles said the idea for the play just came to him. He always had an interest in stars. He's always written songs about them. But his interest is strictly

artistic, not scientific. Over the years, he's written a couple hundred songs.

Now 46, Meyrelles is writing two pieces, a play and a choral work. While his musical had a short life in fickle New York, Meyrelles wouldn't trade the experience.

"It would have been really great to have my play run in New York indefinitely," he said. "But I accepted its fate from the start."

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WL board candidates uncontested

BY STACY JENKINS
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The race for school board seats in the Walled Lake school district will be somewhat tame, but one newcomer hopes to join the ranks.

Two four-year seats are open, but the candidates will go uncontested in the June 14 election.

In Walled Lake, incumbent Alp Onder is seeking another term and newcomer Mary Ellen Trott is running for a four-year term, currently held by David Carlisle, who chose not to run again.

Trott, a 22-year resident of Commerce Township, is a well-known parent volunteer on numerous committees and parent-teacher organizations in the Walled Lake schools. She serves on the district's learning team, strategic planning team, the building and feasibility committee, the diversity committee and is current president of the Walled Lake Western High School Parent Teacher Student Association.

A media technician for the West Bloomfield school district, Trott said she wants to continue working for children as a school board member.

"I really believe in public education. I love kids, I love the community and I feel I can contribute and be a part of the process to make sure all kids in Walled Lake succeed," Trott said.

Onder said he is seeking re-election to the Walled Lake school board because he wants continue making a difference.

"I enjoy seeing all of the hard work we've done in past years come to fruition," Onder said. "And I'm still enjoying it."

Onder, a financial advisor, served a one-year term before being elected to a four-year term, which expires in June. This will be his second four-year term on the board.



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