

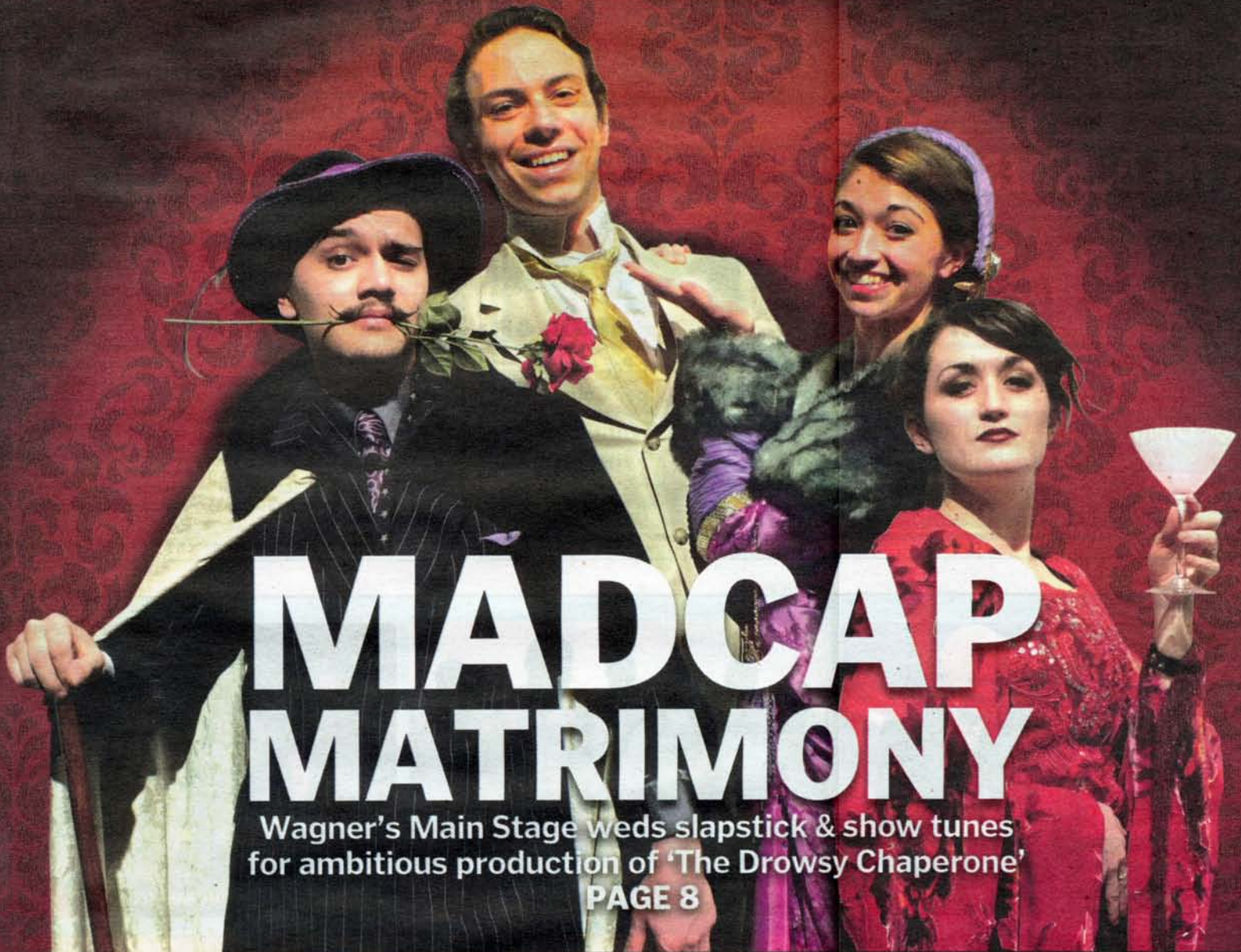
AWAWE

ADVANCE WEEKLY ENTERTAINMENT

{FEBRUARY 20-26, 2014}



INSIDE: S.I.'s 'Worst,' Jac Mao's Fortune & 'Beautiful' Dru Hepkins



MADCAP MATRIMONY

Wagner's Main Stage weds slapstick & show tunes for ambitious production of 'The Drowsy Chaperone'

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St. George Theatre

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www.StGeorgeTheatre.com ticketmaster



March 2, 2014

You Deserve a Night Out!



March 30, 2014



kathy GRIFFIN
April 16, 2014

... YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO WITNESS THE WEDDING OF SLAPSTICK & SHOW TUNES ON THE MAIN STAGE

MADCAP

STORY BY ROB BAILEY • BAILEY@SIADVANCE.COM

MATRIMONY



Elizabeth Miller as Janet Van De Graaf.

GRYMES HILL — Woe is the local musical theater fan: How many “Sound of Music” and “Grease” productions can one withstand? Sure, both are beloved classics. But one could argue they are done. To death. (Trust me, I have surly, unpublished letters-to-the-editor to prove it.) Apparently, familiarity really can breed contempt.

That’s what makes AWE so psyched for “The Drowsy Chaperone,” the madcap Tony Award-winning musical comedy, coming to Wagner College Theatre’s Main Stage Feb. 26-March 9.

It’s no golden age revival. Nor is it a jukebox joke. It’s not even based on a movie (like “Once” or, groan, “Rocky”). Nah, it’s the most glorious of all endangered stage species: An acclaimed, original musical comedy. One that’s less than a decade old, no less.

“It’s exciting to work with kids on something they haven’t seen 100 times — because they feel like they have some control,” said director Ryan B. Gibbs, who cut his teeth as a stage manager on Broadway (“Wicked”), off-Broadway (“Avenue Q”), national tours (from “Rent” to “Drowsy” to “Mary Poppins”) and scores of regional and stock productions.

“It really frees them up to do their own thing with it,” he adds. “It’s not like they have Robert Preston as ‘The Music Man’ living in their brains, giving them something to live up to.”

In fact, the 35-year-old St. George resident — recruited by Wagner Theatre Department chair Felicia Ruff — said his young charges are uniquely suited for a show subtitled “The



WAGNER’S BROADWAY BABE: Find out more about what Wagner alum Janine LaManna — star of Broadway’s “Drowsy Chaperone,” “Seussical,” “Sweet Charity” and more — is up to right now at SILive.com.

‘THE DROWSY CHAPERONE: THE MUSICAL WITHIN A COMEDY’

Wagner College Theatre presents the Tony-winning musical comedy

Where: The Main Stage at Wagner College’s Main Hall, One Campus Road and Howard Avenue, Grymes Hill.

When: 8 p.m. Feb. 26-28, March 5-7; 2 & 8 p.m. March 1 and 8; 2 p.m. March 9.

How much: Tickets are \$25-\$28; Wagner students attend free with current ID.

More information: Contact the WCT box office at 718-390-3259 or boxoffice@wagner.edu; Monday-Friday, noon-4 p.m.

Musical Within a Comedy.”

“It’s rare where I do a show — on a professional level — that doesn’t have a Wagner kid in it. My last three tours all had them. That’s why I was so excited to take this job: I never had to worry for one second about the caliber of talent I could get,” Gibbs says.

“It’s really two shows: All the charm of the great old musicals but grounded by a

modern-day narrator telling you about his favorite musical from the 1920s; bringing it to life right in front of you.”

“The Drowsy Chaperone” — music and lyrics by Lisa Lambert and Greg Morrison, book by Bob Martin and Don McKellar — pays homage to Jazz Age/Depression Era shows; specifically their power to transport audiences into a dazzling fantasy and lift spirits in hard times.

It all begins when a diehard musical-theater fan (played by T.J. Lamando), known as “Man in Chair,” plays his favorite cast album, “The Drowsy Chaperone” — and the musical literally bursts to life in his living room.

From the crackle of his hi-fi turntable (remember those?), “The Drowsy Chaperone” tells the tale of a pampered starlet (Elizabeth Miller) who wants to give up show biz to get married, the producer out to sabotage the nuptials, her chaperone (Bronwyn Whittle), the

debonair groom (Tommy Joscelyn), the Latin lover (Keland Alaka’i Sarno) and a pair of gangsters who double as pastry chefs (John Alati and Jonathan Quigley).

WCT’s ensemble also features: Jordan Bunshaft (Feldzieg), Dan Kriss (George), Nick Mestakides

(Underling), Becky Grace Kalman (Kitty), Danielle James (Trix), Grace Woodward (Mrs. Tottendale), Katharine Bragg, Steven Copp, Kelly Hubbell, Robert J. Keir, Jesse Pimpinella and Sarah Rosen.

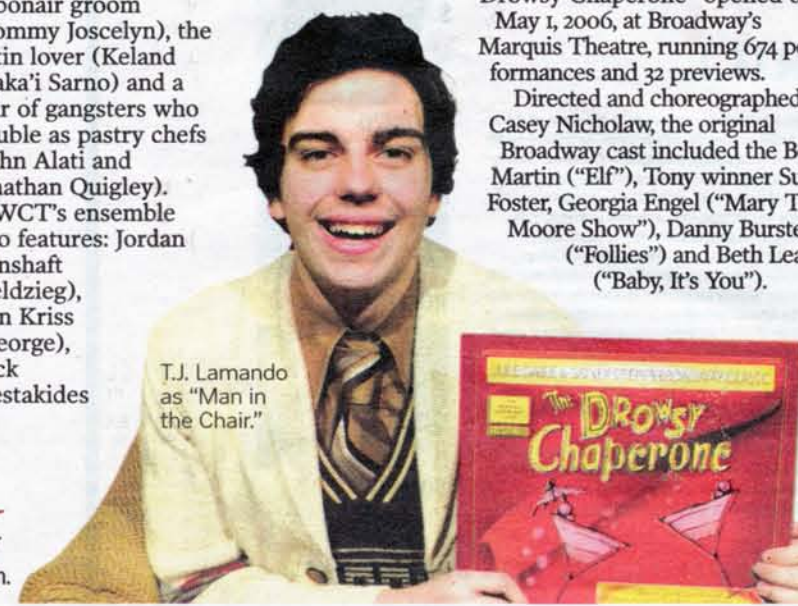
‘DROWSY’ BACKGROUND

The critically acclaimed show was born as a spoof of old musicals written by friends for the real-life stag party of Canadian actor Bob Martin, who was engaged to Second City improv comic Janet Van De Graaf.

The groom was so delighted that when the team retooled it for the Toronto Fringe Fest, he added himself as the narrator. That led to a larger Toronto production, which in turn attracted the attention of late Broadway producer Roy Miller (1960-2013), beloved for his influential work at New Jersey’s SurfFlight Theatre and Paper Mill Playhouse.

After a West Coast tryout, “The Drowsy Chaperone” opened on May 1, 2006, at Broadway’s Marquis Theatre, running 674 performances and 32 previews.

Directed and choreographed by Casey Nicholaw, the original Broadway cast included the Bob Martin (“Elf”), Tony winner Sutton Foster, Georgia Engel (“Mary Tyler Moore Show”), Danny Burstein (“Follies”) and Beth Leavel (“Baby, It’s You”).



T.J. Lamando as “Man in the Chair.”

The latter, as the scene-stealing title character, won the Tony for Best Featured Actress in a Musical.

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

Wagner’s fingerprints are actually all over this crowd-pleasing show.

WCT alums Janine LaManna (“Seussical,” “Sweet Charity”) and Elizabeth Pawlowski both played Janet: LaManna on Broadway and Pawlowski in the show’s national tour.

“This is hands down one of the funniest shows I’ve ever done; one of my favorite theatrical experiences of my life,” says LaManna, from her temporary home in North Carolina, where she’s living with her two young kids while her husband, Mike, a member of the Army’s 82nd airborne, is stationed in Afghanistan.

Other WCT alums connected to the show include Beth Cochran-Renoni and Brian Renoni, assistant company manager and electrician on the first national tour (not to mention dancer Dan Scullin, who did a later tour).

Wagner’s upcoming production is choreographed by Brian Padgett, also from the tour, with musical direction by James Higgins. The creative team: Scenic design by Richard Kendrick, costume design by Kurt Alger, lighting design by Vicki Neal and sound design by Richard Kroth. Macey Best is production stage manager.

“I’m so glad Staten Island is going to have this in its backyard: They are gonna die laughing. Honestly, it’s so perfect in its form, I think it’s foolproof,” LaManna adds. “But ‘Drowsy’ is touching, too. How they wove it in is brilliant; because it comes when you least expect it: You’ve been watching a message the entire show — delivered in a candy-coated, funny, funny package.”



Tommy Joscelyn as Robert Martin.

PHOTOS BY ROBERT J. KEIR