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ENTERTAINMENT

CAREY GILLETTE (EDITOR) • 604-605-2307 • cgillette@theprovince.com | TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2009

BOYS WILL BE BOYZ

ARTS CLUB PRODUCTION:

Plenty have praised Altar Boyz, the smash-hit Broadway musical that follows a Christian boy band

STAGE B3

PLUS: WHO WON JESSIE AWARDS LAST NIGHT PAGE B3

From left: Geoff Stevens, Vincent Tong, Charles MacEachern, David Hurwitz and Jeremy Crittenden in Altar Boyz. — SUBMITTED PHOTO BY DAVID COOPER



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Singing the praises of Altar Boyz

MUSICAL COMEDY: Show funny enough to convert the unbelievers

On stage

Altar Boyz

Where: Arts Club, Granville Island Stage

When: Thursday to Aug. 1

Tickets: \$43 and \$25 at 604-687-1644 or artsclub.com

BY STUART DERDEYN
ARTS REPORTER

Altar Boyz is a musical theatre comedy about a five-member Christian boy band coming straight outta Ohio into the big city on its "Raise the Praise" tour.

Since debuting in New York off-Broadway in 2004, the show has converted devilishly difficult critics into followers. Along the way, it has won numerous awards and become the longest-running new musical in the Big Apple's cutthroat stage scene. Besides being blessed at home, the show has been translated into a number of languages and resident companies have toured Korea, Hungary, Finland, Philippines and Australia.

The Arts Club Theatre's production just completed a run through the province bringing such hits as "Girl, You Make Me Wanna Wait" and "Jesus Called Me On My Cell Phone" to faithful theatregoers.

Jeremy Crittenden plays Matthew, a.k.a. the long-locked band leader. He is joined by Jak Barradell as Luke (the bad boy), David Hurwitz as Mark (the sensitive one), Vincent Tong as Juan (the Latin lover) and Geoff Stevens as Abraham (the chief songwriter who also happens to be Jewish). A live backing band of key-



Nailing the harmonies and choreographing the dance moves takes about all the Altar Boyz have got. — SUBMITTED PHOTO BY DAVID COOPER

boardist Sasha Niechoda, drummer Buff Allen, guitarist David Sinclair and keyboardist Jim Hodgkinson brings da noize for da boyz.

"It's a very funny show dealing with religion, which can be very touchy, and pop culture, which isn't, that walks the line really carefully," says Crittenden.

"There really isn't anything in it

that is so absurd to turn it into a farce, either, which is one of the reasons why I think it does so well.

"I'd like to think that our aim is to be as believable as a real boy band as possible so you don't have to suspend belief too much."

Turns out that nailing those tight five-part harmonies, mega-taut choreographed moves and spotlight

solos was really hard to develop. He says that the rehearsal schedule was pretty down to the wire and the guys were sweating it to be all that they could be. Watching the show in New York, Crittenden realized that the five actors needed to always function as a unit to make it work. Getting there gave him newfound respect for the 'N Sync's and Backstreet Boys out there.

"Some days, at the end of rehearsals, I couldn't believe how tired I was. The challenge we have in this show is that we do all of the songs, all of the dancing. There is no lip synching, no tracking, no pitch correction. You get out of breath."

And over time, it becomes seamless. However, Crittenden doubts that he's going to morph his artistic pursuits from musical theatre into musical group. The idea of having to sing at weddings, parties and bar mitzvahs up and down the West Coast doesn't sound as fun as being in a hit stage show. There is the issue of those straight locks, too.

"I've had curly hair all my life and having to iron it out every night before the show gives me new understanding of what a lot of women go through to get their styles just right. If I had to do that forever . . . no."

As for whether the idea of a Christian boy band is viable, he notes that there was a Christian punk band that played his high school in Medicine Hat. No word on whether the band's name was the No Sex Pistols.

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Catch Stu's Weekend Fun File on Global's Weekend Morning and Noon News.

The gospel according to 'Matthew' . . .

I might: Take up pottery.

Favourite station of the cross: This question isn't fair, girl. How could I pick just one?!

Favourite saint: St. James the Greater for two reasons. 1. It's pretty dope to have the word "greater" in your saint name. 2. Jesus named him one of the Sons of Thunder, which was the name of my dad's Christian heavy metal band in the '80s.

Hobbies: Turning out phat beatz with my broz, dancing up a storm in praise of the heavenly f-to-the-ather, and decoupage.

Turn-offs: Another trick question . . . you can't turn off the Altar Boyz, cuz we're always on, girl!

I would describe my personal style as: A funky blend of Justin Timberlake, Zac Efron and Nick Carter. But not weird "mushroom-cut, bleached-hair-with-roots" Nick Carter . . . I'm talkin' about "Going on tour again so I gotta get me a six-pack" Nick Carter.

Secular name: Jeremy Crittenden.

— Courtesy of Arts Club Theatre Company

More on the web

For Q&As with the other Boyz and a behind-the-scenes music video of the Boyz rehearsing and performing, go to www.theprovince.com/entertainment

Lots of smiles as Jessies reward some great performances

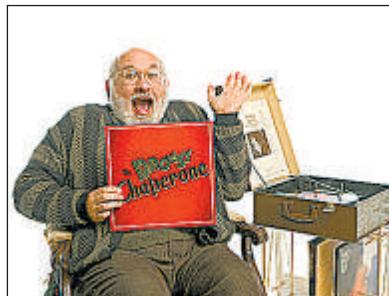
27TH AWARD NIGHT:

Playhouse, Newworld, Bard all great theatre

The results of the 27th Annual Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards were announced at the Commodore Ballroom last night and Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company members were smiling all the way to the podium.

The Playhouse won five Jessies in the large theatre category, including outstanding direction for Max Reimer and outstanding performance by an actor in a lead role Jay Brazeau for their work in *The Drowsy Chaperone*.

Other winning Playhouse productions included *Frost/Nixon*, *Miss Julie*:



A Jessie went to Jay Brazeau for playing Man in Chair in *The Drowsy Chaperone*. — SUBMITTED PHOTO

Freedom Summer and two awards for the co-production with the Savage Society of *Where the Blood Mixes*.

Bard on the Beach racked up three wins. Jennifer Lines won for outstanding performance by an actress

in a lead role for her brilliant turn in *The Tempest*, which also won outstanding sound design for Alessandro Juliani. Simon Bradbury's work in *Titus Andronicus* secured outstanding performance by an actor in a supporting role.

Newworld Theatre's *Are We There Yet?* took home three Jessies in the theatre for young audiences category — outstanding production, outstanding artistic creation and significant artistic achievement, ensemble performance. The French-language Théâtre La Seizième won best set and costume design for Drew Facey's work in *Ecran de fumée*.

The small theatre category was as tight as ever with Jennifer Mawhinney and Russell Roberts winning outstanding performances in lead roles

for their intense energy in Rumble Productions/Theatre Conspiracy's *Blackbird*. Multi-winning company Ruby Slippers took home three awards for its *Life Savers*. Touchstone Theatre, Progress Lab, Pi Theatre, Leaky Heaven Circus each won a single award.

The critic's choice innovation award and outstanding production award went to Electric Theatre Company and Virtual Stage's *No Exit*.

— Stuart Derdeyn

More on the web

For a full list of winners, go to www.theprovince.com/entertainment



Russell Roberts and Jennifer Mawhinney won for *Blackbird*. — SUBMITTED PHOTO