

STAGE

Heaven help us — here come the Altar Boyz

Spoof of Christian-rock boy bands comes off the road to settle into the Arts Club Theatre's Granville Island Stage through July

BY PETER BIRNIE
VANCOUVER SUN

When we last encountered *Altar Boyz*, the tongue-in-cheek tribute to clean-cut Christian-rock boy bands was about to head out on tour.

Through January and February, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Juan and their Jewish friend Abraham sang the praises of singing the praises across Metro Vancouver and further afield in Vernon, Cranbrook and Nelson.

But this bright spoof starring five fresh-faced guys hasn't reached Vancouver — until now. After a long hiatus, *Altar Boyz* starts previews this week on the Arts Club Theatre's Granville Island Stage for an extended run through to Aug. 1.

David Hurwitz had only been on tour once before, a decade ago, with a Manitoba Theatre Centre production of *Ethan Claymore*. Singing as Mark in *Altar Boyz*, Hurwitz was delighted to rediscover the pleasures of hitting the highway.

"It was great being on the road," he says, "and it was interesting that the show was a little bit different every night, because we'd be on a different stage in a different town."

While Hurwitz has dramatic chops, most memorably in a 2007 Third Street Theatre production of Edward Albee's *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?*, he's best known for a pleasing professionalism in musical theatre — *The Music Man* at the Playhouse and *Into the Woods* for Patrick Street Productions among others.

During the wait for *Altar Boyz* to reopen, Hurwitz has been as far removed from twiddling thumbs as you can get.

In fact, he's been part of an ambitious campaign by musical-theatre superstar Andrew Lloyd Webber to rework a show once known as *The Beautiful Game*.

Anyone who knows "footie" will

At a glance

ALTAR BOYZ

On the Arts Club Theatre's Granville Island Stage, 1585 Johnston, to Aug. 1.

Tickets \$25 to \$43, go to artsclub.com or call 604-687-1644



NICOLE MCLUCKIE

Jeremy Crittenden (left), Charles MacEachern, David Hurwitz, Geoff Vincent and Vincent Tong appear in *Altar Boyz*.

recognize that expression, first coined by Brazilian soccer star Didi and later used by countryman Pelé in the title of his autobiography, *My Life and the Beautiful Game*. Unfortunately for Webber and collaborator Ben Elton, the debut of *The Beautiful Game* in 2000 saw it instantly dubbed "the football musical."

While it enjoyed a respectable London run and some critical praise, the show went no further. It didn't help that what was supposed to be a love story set across reli-

gious lines during "the Troubles" in Belfast had a dark tone and decidedly downbeat ending.

Fast forward to this year, and Elton is at the Manitoba Theatre Centre to rework *The Beautiful Game* into a whole new show, *The Boys in the Photograph*.

Happily, the comedian and writer (TV's infamous *Blackadder* and the Queen musical *We Will Rock You* among many other efforts) agreed with Webber that this time they had better bloody well cheer up.

Cue David Hurwitz, who enters the picture as one of the cast members working with Elton.

Six weeks of workshops and rehearsal at the MTC led to a brief Winnipeg run seen as so successful that Toronto impresario David Mirvish will open *The Boys in the Photograph* at his Royal Alexandra Theatre in October.

Hurwitz had already relocated to Hogtown, a place he'd learned to love during his work with the original Toronto production of *Hairspray*.

Atop that cast as Edna was none other than our own Jay Brazeau.

"It was awesome," says Hurwitz. "He is such an amazing guy, so gracious, and his talents are inspiring for us young actors. It was a joy to work with Jay, and he's become a great friend of mine since then."

Sun Theatre Critic
pbirnie@vancouver.sun.com



TO SEE VIDEO TRAILER,
GO TO
VANCOUVERSUN.COM