



Musical Theatre Artists of Pittsburgh holds reading of Disney spoof

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By Sharon Ebersson / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Musical Theatre Artists of Pittsburgh began almost four years ago to nurture the collaboration of artists developing new shows. You can see the fruits of the group's work firsthand tonight in a free public reading of "Off With her Maidenhead," with book and lyrics by Amy Claussen and music by James Rushin.

The 7:30 p.m. reading will be held at Pitt Studio Theatre in the Cathedral of Learning, Oakland, with local performers and educators such as Courtney Bassett, Patrick Cannon, Bria Walker, Stacey Cabaj, Lisa Ann Goldsmith and Rocky Paterra.

Erik Schark established the group with guidance from Stephanie Riso, co-founder of Pittsburgh Irish & Classical Theatre and Cabaret Pittsburgh (2004-08). Ms. Riso is now leading the way as executive director, with managing leadership by Jeanne Drennan and Steve Cuden, co-writer of the musical "Jekyll & Hyde," in an advisory role.

Ms. Drennan and fellow MTAP member David Berlin have begun work with Ms. Cabaj's musical theater class at the University of Pittsburgh to develop their musical, "Dear Boy," a tale of parental love pitted against a secret romantic love. Ms. Claussen and Mr. Rushin met at one of the first MTAP get-togethers and immediately began collaborating on "Off With her Maidenhead," a musical that takes an irreverent look at Disney princesses.

Ms. Riso recalled that Mr. Rushin came in from West Virginia and played some of his music and Ms. Claussen gave a PowerPoint presentation about the story she wanted to write.

"She was looking for someone who could write spoofs of Disney-esque tunes, and we all knew right away that they should work together," said Ms. Riso.

MTAP came about when she returned from the national BMI musical theater program in the fall

of 2008, wanting to share her experience. About the same time, former Pittsburgher Mr. Scharck sent out an email about forming a group to encourage the development of new musicals.

"He and I spent a couple of coffees talking over ideas," she said, and MTAP was born. "By February 2011 I had proposed the name and a short statement of purpose to Erik, which he accepted and decided to use for the group." The statement reads: MTAP: A diverse group of artists living in the Pittsburgh area interested in creating and expressing stories through the musical theater lens and finding professional outlets for these stories. The first meeting was held at March 16, 2011, in City Theatre's rehearsal space and after a few stops and starts, MTAP regrouped in October 2012.

The group now has about 80 members and about a dozen regulars who attend monthly meetings at the Wightman School Community Building in Squirrel Hill. For more on the program and the Sunday reading, visit mtap.weebly.com.