

Arts/Entertainment

Gonna be a big play some day

Now playing in Toronto, the stage production "We Will Rock You" brings the theatrical music of Queen to the stage.

By MICHAEL KUCHWARA
AP Drama Writer

TORONTO — For more than 10 years, the Pantages, a restored movie and vaudeville house on a shabby block of Yonge Street, was home to "The Phantom of the Opera," the wildly popular Andrew Lloyd Webber musical.

Now, nearly eight years later, the theater, corporately rechristened the Canon, is occupied by another British import, "We Will Rock You," which uses songs of that iconic 1970s and '80s rock band Queen. And while no one is suggesting this futuristic comic strip of a musical will last as long as "Phantom," its producer and creative team undoubtedly would like to see a successful Toronto run.

"We have to look to audiences to tell us whether we can have that," says producer David Mirvish. "The way things are going, we have every hope that that will happen. The chances are we are going to be the home of rock for the summer."

It could be boon for Mirvish and, in general, commercial Toronto theater, which has faltered in recent years, unable to attract long runs like it did in the days of "Phantom," "Mamma Mia!" and "The Lion King." Those runs were fueled, in part, by American audiences, who, since 9/11 and SARS, have not been as plentiful. One question mark will be if the rising Canadian dollar and more stringent American passport requirements affect cross-border travel.



Members from "We Will Rock You" perform a number from the musical, which uses songs by the rock band Queen. Stars of the show in Toronto are Erica Peck, center, and Yvan Pedneault, second from right.

"We Will Rock You," which opened here April 10, premiered in England in May 2002 and is still running there despite what its British director and book writer Ben Elton laughingly says "were possibly the worst reviews in the history of London theater."

Some Toronto critics sniffed, too, but the notices were not as scathing as those in England and a few were practically favorable. The Globe and Mail, a national daily, gave the musical three stars out of four. And most of the reviewers cheered the show's music — the work of all four of the band's members: singer Freddie Mercury, who

died of AIDS in 1991; guitarist Brian May; drummer Roger Taylor and bass player John Deacon.

For Elton, it's a vindication of sorts. The ebullient novelist, actor, director and standup comic, who's best known in America as co-writer of the "Blackadder" TV series, was the spark plug who jolted "We Will Rock You" to life. But then the man has been an admirer of Queen's music for years.

"They are very much my generation," the 47-year-old Elton says. "I left home when I was 16 to go away to college to study drama, and the very week I left, Queen went to No.

1 with 'Bohemian Rhapsody.' ... but I certainly didn't pursue them or ever imagine particularly that our lives would cross — let alone bond in the kind of extraordinary way they have. Brian and Roger and I are very, very, very close colleagues now and have been for five years. It would be lovely to say that they stared down at me from my bedroom wall — but I only had pictures of girls on my bedroom wall."

Elton had to be convinced that there was a stage work in the group's music, although he says: "The theatrical potential of Queen's music is a no-brainer. It's unique in pop music in its kind of grandiose, theatri-

cal, faux-operatic style. Freddie, of course, was immensely interested in every aspect of theater. Perhaps his only rival in that was (David) Bowie in the way he brought theater into his work."

Individually and together, all four members of Queen wrote hits: Mercury, for example, creating "Bohemian Rhapsody," Deacon writing "Another One Bites the Dust," Taylor "A Kind of Magic" and May, the well-known anthem "We Will Rock You." But how do you put them into a musical?

It was producer Phil McIntyre who had the idea for a musical, one based on Mercury's life, but the notion

never went anywhere. McIntyre asked Elton to get involved but he was busy with Lloyd Webber writing a musical called "The Beautiful Game."

It was only later that Elton reconsidered, but he rejected the biographical idea. "I wanted something that would reflect the spirit of Queen. And if you think of one word in Britain to reflect Queen it's 'legend,'" the man says. "We like our legendary rock, and the moment you think legend, you think suddenly Arthur ... King Arthur ... the Sword in the Stone and I'm thinking what about an ax in the stone? What about a mighty guitar buried in rock and he who can draw it forth and play the mighty riff? All kinds of heavy-metal silliness."

At the same time, Elton had seen the movie "The Matrix," and he reveled in its fantasies about people "abused by a vast brain that's kind of running the planet and nobody knows it."

"So I imagined a 'Matrix' world where, yes, the machine controls everything, but only in an effort to constantly force it to consume more entertainment and pay for it and download more and more of it."

In this world, 300 years in the future, musical instruments are banned and the kids are only allowed to purchase computerized, digitalized pop music — until a young rebel, an outsider who frees them from their musical bondage to the aptly named Killer Queen.

"It suddenly struck me that you could combine King Arthur with all the usual future fantasies from '1984' to 'The Matrix' and you would have a Queen musical," Elton says.

The play includes an outcast as its young hero, called Galileo, just like in "Bohemian Rhapsody," who hooks up with a feisty young woman named Scaramouche.

APO/MIRVISH PRODUCTIONS

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Jazz is no 'museum piece' for CA grad

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His work as a professional saxophone player at one point took him to Tucson, where he met and married his wife Jennifer in 1996, and to Hilton Head, S.C., where he got fired for trying to organize fellow musicians from a nightclub and his career as a labor-union organizer began.

During Crane's three-year stint at Jazz 90.1, the station expanded from 2,000 to 15,000 watts and got involved with the then-fledgling Rochester International Jazz Festival.

After he stepped down as station manager in 2004, he was a stay-at-home dad for about a year and then launched "The Jason Crane Show," first on the local Air America affiliate and then as a podcast. It was about "activists and artists, thinkers and writers," and included an interview with British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.

"That was a bit of a coup," Crane says. For the 18 shows, there were more than 5,000 downloads, and a good call-in response, too. But a music writer/friend recommended deciding to focus on either music or activism, so Crane picked music. "Now," he says, "I'm able to reach back out to all these people I knew before."

And they are receptive, if the immediate future of "The Jazz Session" is any indication. "It's booked for months out, and every guest on the show has come to me," Crane says.

For those first seven shows, they came from the U.S., Canada, Venezuela, France, Japan, Jamaica and Russia. "That's a really exciting expression to me of how global this music is," Crane says.

With theme music by The Respect Sextet, a group of Eastman grads who play professionally in New York City, "The Jazz Session" becomes available every Monday as an MP3 file, available on iTunes or at www.thejazzsession.com.

While Crane is a fan of the classics like John Coltrane, Billie Holiday and Miles Davis, he wants his show and all of the artists it features to serve as a testament to the fact that jazz is not a thing of the past.



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Jason Crane's love of jazz is rooted in family. His grandfather, Bernie Flanders of Canandaigua, played saxophone and clarinet in various bands. That's him in the center of the back row, fourth from left, in this 1930 photo.

"It's not a museum piece," Crane says. "It's a vital music."

Show No. 3 of "The Jazz Session" featured guitarist John Abercrombie, "a huge name."

"He consistently sells out festivals," he says of the guitarist, who allowed Crane to include excerpts from his new album, a month before they were otherwise released.

Despite dealing with people of Abercrombie's caliber, Crane says he seldom encounters an ego.

Take, for example, a 2004 interview with Grammy Award winner Bobby McFerrin and drummer/pianist/composer Jack DeJohnette.

"They could sell out any club anywhere in the world, and they couldn't have been any nicer," he says.

What's also nice for Crane is being able to produce "The Jazz Session" from the comfort of his own home.

"Half the time, I'm in my jammies, and I'm interviewing people who are touring the world and playing this music," he says.

Not that Crane is a homebody, by any means.

In addition to his union work, his status as a self-proclaimed "action dad" to his two little boys and his work announcing "The Jazz Session," he is an announcer for the Silver Base Ball Park League at Genevieve Country Village & Museum in Mumfords, a board member for Rochester's Abundance Cooperative Market, the leader of the 24th Legislative District Committee leader for the Monroe County Democratic Party, the former chair of the Green Party of Monroe County, and a writer for a Web site called All About Jazz. "It's been quite a life so far," he says.

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Music Reviews

Various artists

"A Tribute to Joni Mitchell" (Nonesuch)

If you're looking for musical coherence, a Joni Mitchell tribute album is about the last place to come. Mitchell's own challenging compositions, coupled with the stylistic variety of the artists who pay her due, make for a wild ride.

Everyone tries hard here, out of respect. Where this disc is least successful is where you can feel the effort. Elvis Costello takes on the particularly challenging "Edith and the Kingpin," perhaps to prove he can, and the results feel more like an exercise than a song. Bjork's "The Boho Dance" has more charm, yet she's working harder than a

schoolkid on final exam day.

The most unfortunate take is "Free Man in Paris," where Sufjan Stevens twists the melody out of shape and piles on enough trumpets and xylophone that it becomes "A Tribute to Sufjan Stevens."

K.d. lang's "Help Me" is sumptuous — you'd expect no less from that voice — but the performance too respectful. Another big-league voice, from Emmylou Harris, more successfully turns "The Magdalene Laundries" into a country lament.

The most memorable cuts here are Prince's "A Case of You" and James Taylor's "River." Both nail Mitchell's spirit by adding a jazzy playfulness to two of her prettiest melodies.

— David Bauder, *The Associated Press*

2007 FARMINGTON TOWN CLEANUP

May 3, 4 and 5

Town of Farmington Residents Only	
HOURS: Thursday - 7:00AM - 7:00PM Friday - 7:00AM - 7:00PM Saturday - 7:00AM - 3:00PM	LOCATION: Town of Farmington Transfer Station on Hook Rd. between Martz Rd. and Green Rd.
IDENTIFICATION: All persons will be required to verify that they are a town of Farmington resident.	
Residential Waste Only - No Commercial or Industrial Material	
TIRES WILL BE ACCEPTED WITH THE FOLLOWING CHARGE:	
Automobile Tires	\$2.00
Truck Tires	\$5.00
Large Tires/Tractor Tires (19" & above)	\$8.00
MUST BE OFF THE RIM	
ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT: TV or Computer Monitor or Any Equipment With Memory/Screen	
LIMIT ONE PER HOUSEHOLD	
EACH ADDITIONAL UNIT WILL BE \$10.00/UNIT	
FREON UNITS: Refrigerator, Freezer, Dehumidifier, Air Conditioner	
LIMIT ONE PER HOUSEHOLD	
ADDITIONAL UNITS WILL BE \$20.00/EACH	
BRUSH: All wood and brush must be no longer than a length of 4 to 6 feet and capable of being handled by two (2) men.	
MATERIALS NOT ACCEPTED: • Automobiles • Motor Oil • Hazardous Materials • Liquids • Household Garbage or Waste • Paint (paint cans will be accepted only if cans have been left open and the contents have been drained.)	
PROGRAM OPERATION: The entire cleanup program is sponsored by the town of Farmington.	
FARMINGTON HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT: (315) 986-5540	
FARMINGTON TOWN HALL: (315) 986-8100	