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## Staten Island boys will be girls in 'La Cage,' but the risk pays off

by VICTORIA PRIOLA

Sometimes you gotta bend the rules — and the genders.

Sure, the nationally acclaimed Wagner College Theatre took a risk by choosing “La Cage aux Folles” as its new Main Stage production — but after a triumphant opening night, the non-traditional collegiate choice appears to prove love is love is love.

“It’s one of those, what seems to be, controversial shows — but in the end, it’s all about family and heart,” said director-choreographer Rusty Curcio.

Jerry Herman and Harvey Fierstein’s Tony-winning musical, based on a French play, follows beloved gay partners Georges and Alban, as they manage and perform at their Saint-Tropez Cabaret. The hit show also inspired the 1996 film “The Birdcage,” starring Robin Williams and Nathan Lane.

During rehearsals, when we asked if there was any backlash within the campus community about the WCT’s production choice, Curcio said there might be haters but he hasn’t heard any complaints.

“I don’t know what audiences will say or think, but I hope they see that the show is about what love really means. That’s the heart of show.”

Curcio has worked on multiple productions of “La Cage aux Folles” but bringing it to Wagner’s stage was a special challenge. To be fair, it’s not easy for a group of college kids to play characters that are meant to be in their 30s.

“With any show, you have to bring it to the sensibility to the cast you have ... we’re ready to tackle it,” Curcio said.

As Alban and his drag alter-ego, Zaza, senior theater performance major Dean Marino delivers the production’s classic anthem: “I Am What I Am,” Broadway’s show tune ode to self-empowerment for anyone who’s ever dared to be different.

Marino declared this his biggest and most challenging role yet: “It’s a three-hour marathon but it’s such a fantastic show to be in.”

Researching how female impersonation has changed since the ‘70s and ‘80s, learning how to change his voice as different characters and picking up the choreography helped him prepare for the “culmination of everything I’ve learned over the past four years.”

**IF YOU GO TO THE SHOW:** Wagner College is located at 1 Campus Road in Grymes Hill. The show runs April 20-30. Curtains are Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m., with matinees at 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Call the box office at 718-390-3259 or emailing [boxoffice@wagner.edu](mailto:boxoffice@wagner.edu) for ticket information.

**MEET THE CAST & CREATIVE CREW:** WCT’s production is run under Curcio, associate director is Patrick Ryan Hefferan and music director David Sisco.

The cast: Dean Marino (Albin/ZaZa), Gregory Ippolito (George), Matthew Drinkwater (Jean-Michel), Kristine Palka (Anne), Ross Coughlin (Jacob), Liam Abate (Edouard Dindon), Sabrina Kalman (Marie Dindon), Sophia Tzougros (Jacqueline), Matt Healey (M. Renaud), Mari Skoultchi (Mme. Renaud) and Samantha Ross (Francis).

The Cagelles are played by: Clint Maddox Thompson (Chantal), Sydni Session (Hanna), Gabriel Green (Phaedra), Emma Pittman (Clo Clo), Kolten Bell (Bitelle), Tyler Ross (Mercedes), Justin Flores (Dermah), Katie Van Horn (Odette).

The Ensemble features Zach Blanchette (Pierre), Cassie Dougherty (Paulette), Ryan Garbee (Laurent), Jonah Hale (Jacques), Dana Kluczyk (Monette), Michael Motkowski (Pepe), Kaitlin Quann (Colette), Carolyn Savoia (Babette), Kevin Atwater (Ettienne), and Gabe Trimbur (Tabbarro).

The creative team includes Phill Hickox (scenic design), Alan Smith (costume design), Vicki Neal (lighting design), Richard Kroth (sound design), Angie Johnson (wig and makeup design), Rodd Sovar (wardrobe supervisor) and Angie Nortz (production stage manager).