

VILLAGE THEATRE WORLD PREMIERE

# Developing A New Musical

## Through The Eyes Of Martin Charnin:

**A Village Originals Developmental Production and The World Premiere of *Robin Hood: The Legend Continues***

December 10-23, 2004 at First Stage, 120 Front Street North, in downtown Issaquah

Village Theatre is thrilled to welcome the world premiere developmental production of *Robin Hood: The Legend Continues*, from lyricist/director Martin Charnin (*Annie*), librettist Thomas Meehan (*Annie, The Producers, Hairspray*), and composer Peter Sipos (*Joan of Arc*). This rollicking romp of a musical picks up the story twenty years later: Robin Hood and his Merry Men are old men now, with offspring as ribald and rabble-rousing as they once were. Disguise and intrigue, knockabout humor, swashbuckling adventure, and rousing music make this a wise, witty, wonderful take on a beloved tale.

### A Musical's Journey

"I love words," says lyricist Charnin. Key moments in his creative process, he says, happen around words. The key moment for *Robin Hood: The Legend Continues* happened late one night during an airing of Errol Flynn's *Robin Hood*. Says Charnin, "TV Guide called it 'one of the most swashbuckling movies ever produced,' and it made me wonder—what would happen if there was not a lot of swash, but still a lot of buckle?" This led him to think about what happened to Robin and his merry men when they got older—when they got arthritis. "In their day, 50 was old!" Charnin exclaims. "What happened, I wondered, when they became the over the hill gang." This also led him to contemplate what happens to the next generation—when the youth have to fill the footprints of the parents and those footprints are so big. What would life be like for the children of the Merry Men?

The journey of *Robin Hood: The Legend Continues* began in 1997 when Charnin and composer Sipos were working together on a musical telling of *Joan of Arc*. Charnin was directing the show, which had turned out to



Martin Charnin, Lyricist/Director

have a limited audience, but he and Sipos got along really well and Charnin was drawn to the music. When the material became available after *Joan of Arc* closed Sipos contacted Charnin and the two began work on *Robin Hood* with Meehan. After two readings of the script, with only minor changes being made, the authors were ready for a production.

### The Essential Role of an Audience

Village Originals is developing a reputation for its audiences. *One Red Flower* (formerly *One Red Flower: Letters from 'Nam*), alum of the nationally recognized new musicals program, recently opened at Signature Theatre in Washington, DC (August 17 through October 3, 2004). This moving and electric show about six soldiers in Vietnam, based on actual letters, was written by Emmy Award-winning director Paris Barclay. The creators of the musical have been in constant contact with Village Theatre's artistic team since the developmental production at Village Theatre in 2002. "We have been involved in on-going, constructive conversations since that presentation," says show producer Ted Rawlins of Dee Gee Entertainment from Los Angeles. "The production at Village Theatre was an amazing part of *One Red Flower's* journey," he says. "Each step of the way is educational for the artistic team and the work with Village Theatre was incredibly important to the development of the show." The greatest accomplishment, however, took place in



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the theatre itself, with the reactions of the audience: “The Village Theatre audiences were amazing for how passionate and well spoken they were about what the show needed for its next step,” says Rawlins. “We still get emails from people who saw the show in Issaquah.”

Charnin agrees that the audience is essential for the growth of a new musical. The team felt very strongly about the need to get the show up on its feet in front of an audience. “We were missing that last collaborator—the final collaborator is the audience,” says Charnin. We can create three of the walls—back stage, stage right, and stage left, but that fourth wall can only be created by the audience.”

### Location, Location, Location

Charnin also wanted *Robin Hood: The Legend Continues* to have a production outside of New York. These days, Charnin insists, for a show to be considered a success New York becomes only a stop. For a show to really make it, it has to be successful all across the country—on tour. Getting out of New York for a developmental production is, for this reason, essential. Stephen Schwartz, who gave *Wicked* a San Francisco try-out before opening in New York, would agree, as would the producers of *Hairspray*.

And it’s just possible that there is one other great reason to leave the City if you want your new musical to be a success. The support that Village Theatre offers goes beyond great audiences and an away-from-New York location. “There are enough potholes on the road to making a show work,” says Charnin. “You need nice people to work with.” In Executive Producer Robb Hunt, Artistic Director Steve Tomkins, Associate Artistic Director Brian Yorkey, and Associate Producer Denise Martel, as well as the Village Theatre staff, Charnin feels he has found a group who will support his endeavor, and further, truly wish it to succeed. In New York, Charnin admits, there will be those who are so focused on their own work becoming a success that they may not always be on the look-out for what is best for someone else’s work.

Then there’s the tranquility of the setting in Issaquah as opposed to the more intense energy of the city. Sipos would write only love songs if he lived in Issaquah, he says. “The energy here is so peaceful, relaxed. In New York I wake up already stressed out and

by the time I’ve gone out for coffee I’m a nervous wreck. Here, I would write only ‘boy loves girl, girl loves boy, all is happy’ music.” For a romantic musical, such as *Robin Hood: The Legend Continues*, that could well be an essential difference.

Another reason Issaquah is proving an asset in the world of creating new musicals is the local talent. When Hunt was originally talking with Charnin about doing the show here, one of the things he offered was a great talent pool. “We saw 100 actors for auditions,” Charnin says. “We called back 40 of those. In New York, we would have seen 500 and only called back 10.” The cast will include local favorite Hugh Hastings (Daddy Warbucks in *Annie* at Village Theatre) as the aging Robin Hood himself.

The show’s physical design, such as costumes and sets, are being designed to highlight the production rather than to overshadow it. “We don’t want the sets and costumes to get in the way of the story,” says Charnin. The idea with a developmental production is to see how the show works on its feet, fully staged and with an audience. Set and lighting design is by Alex Berry, who did sets

and lights for the 2002 Village Original *One Red Flower* at Village Theatre and has been lighting designer for numerous Village Theatre Mainstage productions as well as for Civic Light Opera, Broadway Performance Hall, and ACT. Costumes are being designed by Deborah Skorstad who designed Village Theatre’s KIDSTAGE SummerStock production of *Anything Goes*, and also has designed for Seattle Shakespeare Company, Taproot Theatre, and Seattle Children’s Theatre. The music for the production will



Peter Sipos, Composer

be more lush than a typical new work score but only one man will be in the pit. Music Director David Maddux has been working with composer Sipos to create a full digital orchestra. Run off a computer in the orchestra pit this electronic band will then travel with the show as it has future productions.

*Robin Hood: The Legend Continues* runs in Issaquah at Village Theatre’s First Stage, 120 Front Street North, from December 10 through 23, 2004. For more information, visit HYPERLINK “http://www.villagetheatre.org” or call the Issaquah Box Office at (425) 392-2202.

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