



Homo School Musicals

It's time to shed our snobbishness and own up to the fact that the most important musical of the last 10 years is not *Rent*, *Avenue Q* or *Spring Awakening*. It's *High School Musical*.

Please stop throwing tomatoes at me. The truth is *High School Musical* not only ended the reign of those bloated Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber turds, but it also packaged and sold old-style musical theatre to a whole new generation of youngsters, all of whom now want to become triple threats.

The importance of *High School Musical* has been acknowledged by two very different men of the theatre, directors Evan Tsatsias and Howard Kane. Tsatsias is shepherding a song cycle about growing up called *Edges*. Kane is directing the mega-spectacle that is the Northbound Leather Fashion Show, called X-pose.

Neither show bears any resemblance to *High School Musical* but the way *Edges* is being marketed makes one realize the importance of the youth market. "The tour of *Spring Awakening*, for instance, used Facebook to alert kids who loved the show in whatever town they were coming to," says Tsatsias. "In a matter of a week you could have this massive viral campaign in anticipation of the show." And it costs nothing. Interestingly enough, *Edges* pays tribute to its chief advertising source with a number called "The Facebook Song."

What all this has resulted in is the emergence of 'Edgeheads,' crazy fans who, among other things, read the blogs each

character publishes on the show's website. "It makes the audience feel like they've come to see friends," explains Tsatsias. I have to wonder, if Sally Bowles published a blog back in the '70s would I have read it? The promoters are also distributing little postcards with boo hoo hoo bio blurbs on them like "I'm trained in civil law. I work retail instead. Our lives are full of expectations."

Over delicious falafels at Agenda, Tsatsias praises the show's songwriters Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, who just won a Jonathan Larson Award. In fact, he feels that *Edges* just might be the next *Rent*. Tsatsias has certainly come a long way from the Disney cruise ships he worked on when he started out in theatre. "Goofy came on to me the whole time," he recounts with a sigh.

Over on the other side of town the Northbound Leather show X-pose is being positioned as an indictment of the fashion industry. "There is definitely a message, but it's not heavy," says co-creator Howard Kane. The press release elaborates with this juicy tidbit: "Women and men go to get hair removal procedures done by waxing the hair away. In fetish play there is hot candle wax dripping on exposed flesh. We will combine the two together." The show will also feature lots of songs about looks and vanity like "You're So Vain" and in fact opens with Clayton Labbe singing "I Feel Pretty" as a leather-clad dandy from the 1800s. "He's so delicious I think I need to eat him," says Kane, of Labbe.

When not directing cute boys in leather Kane runs the Children's Theatre Project, a school in Richmond Hill with over 125 students.

He's the first to admit that — what else? — *High School Musical* created a huge spike in enrollments.

As for the fashions themselves, Northbound Leather's chief designer Marty Rotman has dipped into antiquity for inspiration. "The clothes are simply stunning," declares Kane, who himself owns a pair of Rotman-designed lace-up leather shorts. Although Kane and Rotman have been friends for years, this

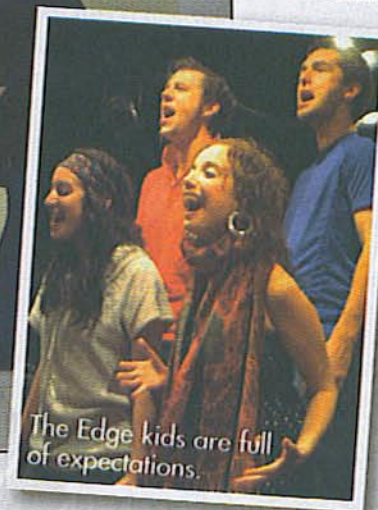
marks the first time they've ever collaborated. "I'm in children's theatre and Marty's in leather, so it just never happened," he explains.

"I'm selective about taking projects outside of the school," says Kane. "I don't want to go out and direct a production of *Anne of Green Garbage Bags* in Markham. But I would work with Marty again." Great. I can hardly wait to see the leather cheerleader outfit Marty might design for some upcoming production of *High School Musical*.

paul@fabmagazine.com



Kane helps Labbe with his extension.



The Edge kids are full of expectations.