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NOW

MY MOTHER'S LESBIAN JEWISH-WICCAN WEDDING by David Hein and Irene Carl. Bread & Circus (299 Augusta). July 9 at 8:15 pm, July 10 at 4:30 pm, July 11 at 6:30 pm, July 12 at 2 pm. Rating: **NNNN**

The title sounds silly, but writer/performers **David Hein** and **Irene Carl** have come up with a true, heartfelt family tribute in musical comedy form.

Hein goes back to his early teens to recall his parents' divorce and his mother's subsequent transformation in the years leading up to the event in the show's title. Musical theatre vets **Lisa Horner** and **Rosemary Doyle** play the moms with humour and sincerity, and **Kyle Orzech** stands out as young David. **Andrew Lamb** skilfully directs the seven-member cast and also squeezes a live three-piece band onto the small stage while keeping the action fluid and fun.

Lindsay Anne Black's clever costumes support the story visually. Although the solemn pre-wedding scene feels gratuitous, that's offset by the audience's wild cheering through 18 witty (and instructive!) songs like *You Don't Need A Penis* and *A Short History Of Gay Marriage In Canada*.

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THEATRE

Fringe hit follows in Drowsy Chaperone's footsteps

BY J. KELLY NESTRUCK

Is *My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding* on its way to becoming the next *Drowsy Chaperone*?

The two wedding-inspired musicals certainly have a lot in common. Both began as artistic gifts to loved ones and were then expanded into Toronto Fringe Festival hits.

And then, yesterday, producer David Mirvish announced that he will present a commercial run of *Wedding*, by David Hein and Irene Carl Sankoff, at the 700-seat Panasonic Theatre beginning Nov. 7.

The last time Mirvish picked up a musical from the Fringe — almost exactly a decade ago — it was *The Drowsy Chaperone*, which went on to win five Tony Awards and run for 674 performances on Broadway.

Hein, a singer/songwriter, originally wrote the musical's title song about his mom's real-life “lesbian, Jewish, Wiccan wedding” as a gift for her.

After it became a crowd favourite on tour, he began expanding the song into an hour-long musical with his wife Sankoff, an actress.

The resulting show was a sellout hit at the Toronto Fringe last month, with word-of-mouth leading to audiences waiting in line for 2½ hours to see it at the 85-seat Bread & Circus theatre in Kensington Market.

Mirvish Productions' director of communications, John Karastamatis, heard about the musical after its very first performance from a rather unlikely source: Sharon Hampson from children's group Sharon, Lois and Brown.

“She sent me an e-mail saying she thought it was the best thing she'd seen in a decade,” says Karastamatis, who also spotted the commercial potential of *The Drowsy Chaperone* in 1999.

Karastamatis went down to the Fringe to see *Wedding* and then Mirvish followed. By the end of the festival, they were negotiating to mount an expanded version of the show in the Panasonic Theatre this fall. (Mirvish's recent purchase of the mid-sized theatre in downtown Toronto makes it easier for the company to “take advantage of these opportunities,” Karastamatis says.) As with the Fringe production, it will be directed by Andrew Lamb and star Lisa Horner, a Shaw and Stratford festivals veteran, as Hein's mother.

Hein and Sankoff look forward to expanding the show, which is about love and acceptance, and based on stories about their unorthodox family that they've entertained their friends with for years.

“It's about how my mom came out to me and how she discovered her sexuality and rediscovered her faith,” says Hein. “I think what is so exciting about it is that it's true — we only changed small things to make it a musical.”

Among the songs are *You Don't Need a Penis*, *Don't Take Your Lesbian Moms to Hooters* and *A Short History of Gay Marriage in Canada*.

Hein and Sankoff admit they did have *The Drowsy Chaperone* in mind as a role model when they produced *My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding* at the Fringe — but the pair are nonetheless surprised and excited to be following so closely in that show's footsteps.

Whether it will have as much commercial success from here on in is an open question. But regardless of how the show does, Hein and Sankoff have already won over the most important audience: Hein's two moms.

“We were really nervous about them coming, but my moms loved it,” he says.



Lisa Horner in *My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding*. LINDSAY ANNE BLACK