

# Final casting announced for Stephen Sondheim's *The Frogs*!



**Michael Matus** and **George Rae** are to head the cast of Stephen Sondheim's *The Frogs*.

They will play Dionysos and Xanthias in the UK premiere of the latest Broadway version of the rarely performed musical, an hilarious send up of Greek comedy and satire, with a book revised and expanded by Nathan Lane.

**The Frogs**, loosely based on a comedy written in 405 BC by Aristophanes, freely adapted for today by Burt Shevelove, and even more freely adapted by Nathan Lane, with Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, produced by House on the Hill Productions in association with Jermyn Street Theatre and directed by Grace Wessels, will premiere at Jermyn Street Theatre from Tuesday 14 March - Saturday 8 April.

**Press nights are Thursday 16 March & Friday 17 March at 7.30pm**

**Michael Matus** has just played Mrs Bumbrake in the UK premiere of *Peter and the Starcatcher*. He has featured in seven shows for the Royal Shakespeare Company. His many West End and major roles include Monsieur Firmin in *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *Lend Me a Tenor*, *Yes Prime Minister*, *Imagine This*, *Martin Guerre* and *The Sound of Music* at Regent's Park.

**George Rae** was nominated for three Best Actor awards as Otto Kringelei in *Grand Hotel* at Southwark Theatre (Best Male Performance in the Off West End Theatre Awards, Best Featured Actor in a New Production of a Musical, Broadway World UK West End Awards and Best Actor in The West End Wilma Awards). Last month, he was named by Mark Shenton as one of The Best Leading Men in UK Musical Theatre in *The Stage*. His other roles include Patsy in *Spamalot* (Frankfurt), Benjamin in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, Schlomo in *Fame*, Rick in *A Slice of Saturday Night*, Mr Two in *Adding Machine*, Timon in *The Lion King* and TJ in *Sister Act*.

The rest of the cast are: Bernadette Bangura (*Ragtime*, Charing Cross Theatre), Martin Dickinson (*Promises Promises*, Southwark Playhouse), Chris McGuigan (*Through the Mill*, London Theatre Workshop), Li-Tong Hsu (*Here Lies Love*, National Theatre), Nigel Pilkington (*The Showstoppers*), Emma Ralston (Little Red Riding Hood in *Into the Woods*), Jonathan Wadey (previously at Jermyn Street Theatre in House on the Hill's UK premiere of *Natural Affection*).

**The Frogs** was originally performed in 1974 in Yale University's gymnasium's swimming pool, featuring members of the Yale swimming team. Meryl Streep and Sigourney Weaver were among its ensemble. This latest version, which opened on Broadway in 2004, includes seven additional Stephen Sondheim songs.

From the same writers behind *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum*, **The Frogs**, playfully explores the great challenges of human existence: confronting our fears, understanding life and death, and challenging the distractions that can prevent us from achieving our goals. This boisterously hilarious yet poignant musical follows Dionysos, Greek god of wine and drama, and his slave Xanthias on a journey to Hades to collect renowned critic and playwright George Bernard Shaw so that he may enlighten the easily misled and coerced masses of Earth. Along this journey, Dionysos and Xanthias meet Herakles, Charon, Pluto, and of course, the chorus of frogs. Then, Shakespeare shows up and starts declaiming his greatest hits; and before long he engages in a battle of words with Mr. Shaw. Who will win the honor of becoming reincarnated: The Bard or Bernard? **The Frogs** stays true to its heritage, mixing Aristophanic pratfall satire with a Sondheim score that swings from witty to pretty to rambunctious, but it also mirrors the Greek original for the serious issue of the role of the arts in a world beset by war and folly.

Broadway star Nathan Lane decided to expand **The Frogs** in 2001. "After September 11 ... I started to think, There's something in this piece right now. ... There's something idealistic about the notion of someone believing that the arts can make a difference ... I found it moving, in light of what is going on in the world."

## BURT SHEVELOVE

Burt Shevelove was born in Newark, New Jersey, graduated from Brown University and received a Master's degree in theatre from Yale. While at Yale, he wrote lyrics for a musical version of Plautus's *Mostellaria* and later became the resident director for the Yale Dramatic Association. After serving as an ambulance driver in World War II, he began a career as a writer, director and producer for radio and television, working with such stars as Judy Garland, Red Buttons, Jack Paar, Cyril Richard, Nancy Walker and Victor Borge; his work won him Emmy and Peabody Awards. His Broadway career began in 1948 with *Small Wonder*, a revue for which he wrote material, co-produced and directed. He also directed a revival of *Kiss Me Kate* (1956), *Hallelujah Baby!* (1968), *No, No, Nanette* (1971; he also wrote the book), *The Frogs* (1974; written with Stephen Sondheim and performed in and around the Yale University pool) and *Happy New Year* (1980; he also wrote the book). He co-wrote the film, *The Wrong Box*, with Larry Gelbart. Burt Shevelove died in 1982.

## STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics for *Saturday Night* (1954), *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way to The Forum* (1962), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *The Frogs* (1974), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday in the Park With George* (1984), *Into The Woods* (1987), *Assassins* (1991), *Passion* (1994) and *Road Show* (2008) as well as lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959) and *Do I Hear a Waltz?* (1965) and additional lyrics for *Candide* (1973). Anthologies of his work include *Side By Side By Sondheim* (1976), *Marry Me a Little* (1981), *You're Gonna Love Tomorrow* (1983), *Putting It Together* (1993/99) and *Sondheim on Sondheim* (2010). He composed the scores of the films *Stavisky* (1974) and *Reds* (1981) and songs for *Dick Tracy* (1990) and the TV production *Evening Primrose* (1966). His collected lyrics with attendant essays have been published in two volumes: *Finishing the Hat* (2010) and *Look, I Made A Hat* (2011). In 2010 the Broadway theatre formerly known as Henry Miller's Theatre was renamed in his honour.

## HOUSE ON THE HILL PRODUCTIONS

House on the Hill Productions also produced the UK premiere of William Inge's *Natural Affection* starring Lysette Anthony at Jermyn Street Theatre.

## CREATIVE TEAM

Director Grace Wessels  
Musical Director: Tim Sutton  
Designer: Gregor Donnelly  
Lighting Designer: Tim Mascal  
Movement: Tim McArthur

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House on the Hill Productions in association with  
Jermyn Street Theatre presents

## THE FROGS

A comedy written in 405 BC by ARISTOPHANES  
freely adapted for today by BURT SHEVELOVE  
and even more freely adapted by NATHAN LANE

Music and lyrics by STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Original orchestration by Jonathan Tunick  
Performed by arrangement with  
Music Theatre International (Europe) Limited

## Jermyn Street Theatre

16b Jermyn Street,  
London SW1Y 6ST  
Box Office: 020 7287 2875  
www.jermynstreettheatre.co.uk

**Tuesday March 14 - Saturday April 8**

Performances:  
Tuesday - Saturday at 7.30pm  
Saturday and Sunday Matinees at 3.00pm,

additional matinees:  
Thursday March 23 at 3.00pm  
Thursday April 6 at 3.00pm

Tickets: £25 £22 conc

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