

The Producers

On and off the Great White Way with an Asbury Couple



Charlie and Gary Maffei in front of the Zipper Theatre in Manhattan.

By Steven Froias
triCityNews editor

On Wednesday, July 27, 2005 "Once Around the Sun" opens at the Zipper Theatre, 336 37th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues in Manhattan.

Another opening, another show in the Big Apple...so what's the big deal?

The big deal for the triCities is that two of the producers of the musical now call none other than Asbury Park home!

Gary and Charles Maffei were part of the creative and cultural wave of gay persons who washed upon our shores (or Shore) some five or six years ago. And like many others they did that after reading our one-time Rainbow Room columnist Michael Liberatore's now famous article published in New York which extolled the virtues of our beloved city to his brethren.

"We were living in Forest Hills at the time," Gary tells triCity, "And I remember reading the article on a Sunday and saying to Charlie 'Let's take a drive down.'" (Gary and Charlie were united in a commitment ceremony

some 15 years ago. At that time, Charlie took Gary's last name. The two are currently one of the couples who have applied for a marriage license in Asbury Park.)

Of course, the duo fell in love with Asbury. Gary came to especially appreciate the fact that in this smaller community, you could actually talk with your city council representatives, an unlikely occurrence in New York City. Charlie was smitten with the camaraderie of the social scene. Additionally, he felt the need to leave a post 9/11 New York.

The two quickly bought their first house - "A starter home" Gary calls it, and just as quickly bought a second, larger place and gave up their Forest Hills residence altogether. (They retain a pied-a-terre in the city for work purposes.)

In between all that moving around, the two also managed to find time to become Broadway producers. They were associate producers for the well received musicals "Newsical" ("A fast, funny and irreverent topic musical revue that zestfully serves up its skewered famous and foolish." - The New York Times) and "Brooklyn - The Musical" ("Imagine 'Hair' or 'Godspell', throw in a helping of Motown and filter the whole thing

through the pyrotechnics of 'American Idol.'" - The Times again), both of which are currently on tour.

And now, they are the co-producers of the new musical, "Once Upon the Sun." And it's a hands on job for these two.

Charlie, who initially sifts through all the material they receive and recommends properties to Gary for production, says the music of "Once Around the Sun" reached out to him. "It's phenomenal!" he says.

Here's the 411 on the story from a Maffei Productions press release: An invitation from a beautiful stranger offers a struggling NY musician the opportunity to escape his disappointments and take a leap of faith into his dream - but at the risk of betraying family, friends and true love. Seduced by his desire to finally be heard, he makes some unexpected choices and ultimately discovers the flight to glory is nothing like he could have ever imagined." Set in N.Y.C. and L.A., "Once Around the Sun" is a musical about Music.

"Featuring an original score by Robert and Steven Morris and Joe Shane and a book by Kellie Overbey, the musical will run through Sept. 18, 2005. Jace Alexander

Continued on page 40

will direct a cast that features Taboo's Asa Somers (who also played the title role in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*), Aida's Maya Days, Little Women's John Hickok, Rent's Jesse Lenat, Brooklyn's Caren Lyn Manuel and West Side Story's Kevin Mambo."

Gary concurred with Charlie's opinion of the piece and they then decided to get involved with the staging of the work. Which entails everything from financing and marketing, to casting and set design.

In this case, the two have a unique space to work with - and are clearly enjoying the sense of creativity that it is inspiring.

On a visit to the Zipper Theatre, triCity saw first hand the decisions Gary and Charlie are helping to make and facilitate that will ensure that attending "Once Around the Sun" is a really groovy night out on the town.

Stage lighting rising up from the floor had been installed just that day, as well as a bank of computers in the lobby and bar area that patrons can use to surf the internet before and after the performance - or e-mail their friends about the show, as Charlie pointed out.

The front row for this show is made up entirely of seats taken from automobiles - and you can even bring your drinks with you into the performance. Seeing "Once Around the Sun" promises to be a pretty unique experience.

And it's an experience that may someday be replicated here in Asbury.

Charlie pointed out that many shows, unlike this production but like their previous ones, typically have out of town try outs in places like Philadelphia

or cities in Connecticut. So why not Asbury?

"It would be a great work place stop," he says, adding that he's talked to the director of Asbury's Black Box and discussed the possibility of working together in the future.

Now that's a production we'd like to see.

In the meantime, catching "Once Upon the Sun" sounds like a good bet for a triCity road trip. The Zipper Theatre is only a few blocks north and to the west of Penn Station, so it's easily accessible via NJ Transit. Here's how to get tickets: The "Once Around the Sun" (www.oncearoundthesun.com) performance schedule is Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 5 and 9 p.m. and Sundays at 3 and 7 p.m. Tickets are available by calling Telecharge.com (212) 239-6200.

Send us an e-mail from the lobby while you're there. (news@triNews.com)

**Seeing
"Once Around the
Sun" promises to be
a pretty unique
experience.**

