

Making musicals in NoHo



Performers who sight read music give writers and producers on-the-spot musical presentations.



By putting together short presentations, ANMT helps producers keep costs down.

Group seeks to resurrect musicals' Golden Era producing style

BY RICK COCA
Special to Valley News

Trying to resuscitate a tradition from entertainment's yesteryear, the Academy for New Musical Theatre in North Hollywood is working to revive the producer-driven musical.

Scott Guy is the executive director for the nonprofit organization and a former television producer and writer.

"It's a model based on the old movie studios, where the producers are in charge," Guy said.

The same was true in American theater's early years, Guy said.

ANMT also serves as a training facility for actors and writers working in musical theater and would eventually like that training to include directors, designers and producers.

"Ultimately what we'd like to be is a 'page to the stage' pipeline," Guy said. "That at whatever level in the theater that you want to work, you can begin here."

Guy said what ANMT offers producers is easily explained via last year's East/West Players production of "Imelda," the hit musical about former Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos.

"We developed it from scratch," Guy said.

It started with East/West Artistic Director Tim Dang approaching ANMT with the

idea of the organization developing a musical for the company about Marcos.

Guy said ANMT presented Dang a two-page story line which Dang approved. Next, Dang suggested composer Nathan Wong who was already affiliated with ANMT. A 15-minute musical presentation was produced, utilizing a group of actors who sight-read music and gather on Monday nights to work on new shows and ideas for ANMT. Eventually this process lead to a full length book with music.

The production was East/West Players second highest grossing play in the company's history.

"It's an entirely different business model," Guy said. "It's not a, 'I want to produce something, what do you have?' (kind of process)."

In the next five years, ANMT wants to either have its own theater or a working relationship with another theater company.

"Ultimately it's less important that we have a physical space," Guy said.

What is important is that

ANMT's producers' program develops so that producers and theater companies utilize it to get their shows into shape before they spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on productions, Guy said.

"I think it's vital to the future of American theater," Guy said.

Guy said the producers' program at ANMT began in 2002, but the writers' workshops have been around in some form since the late-1960s.

It's not intended for first-time writers.

"The people going through our program are not 18-year-olds, they're 40-years old," Guy said. "They're seasoned writers."

Every September, ANMT accepts new members into their writing and acting programs. The cost is \$900 for the first year. For the writers there is an additional charge of \$400 each for composer and lyricist labs.

ANMT also offers six-week summertime labs. For fees, application deadlines or other information, go to www.anmt.org or call (818) 506-8500.