

Broadway Playwright Stephen Cole Talks About 'A Musical Celebration of Broadway'

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New York City's Drama League Show Features Stars Chita Rivera, Donna Murphy, Keith Carradine & Many More Live theater lovers in the New York City area must mark their calendar. Save the date for February 2, 2009, and grab these hot tickets while they last to a very special evening of Broadway theater entertainment. "A

Stephen Cole - Broadway Playwright

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Musical Celebration of Broadway" features an unforgettable night of Broadway stage magic.

New York City's fabled Rainbow Room will be the place to catch the Drama League's annual A Musical Celebration of Broadway. This yearly star studded gala from the Drama League is a lively festival showcase featuring some of Broadway's biggest and brightest stars, including, Chita Rivera, Donna Murphy, Christine Ebersole, Keith Carradine, Cady Huffman, Cheyenne Jackson and Nancy Opel. In honor of the 25th anniversary of The Drama League Directors Project, the event will pay tribute to producers Stewart F. Lane and Bonnie Comley.

I caught up with Stephen Cole, the writer of the show, to learn more about the special event. For him, this year's show above all else most symbolizes, "Broadway's fighting spirit. In these tough financial times, the community is coming out to not only honor a great producer, but to raise money for a great theatrical cause, the Drama League's Director's Project. It also symbolizes a busy period for me!"

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It's not the first time Mr. Cole has written a Drama League benefit, but it's a special first in this regard, "It's the first time I've written a producer tribute. We've done tributes to stars like Liza Minnelli, Chita

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Rivera, Rosie O'Donnell and composers like Cy Coleman. Having a producer (Stewart Lane & Bonnie Comely) to honor is an interesting forum. It's also the 25th Anniversary of the Director's Project (where the money goes) and we're honoring several of the most successful directors to come out of that program. I'm most excited about a reunion of original cast members from La Cage Aux Folles (starring Lee Roy Reems & original Cagelles) and The Will Rogers Follies (Keith Carradine and girls) to recreate numbers from those great show, which incidentally played at the Palace Theatre which our honoree owns! Personally, I'm excited to be working again with Chita Rivera, who starred in my musical Casper.

The evening will be chock full of memorable moments, but Mr. Cole is definitely thrilled about a few specific ones, "I can't wait to be in the room again with Christine Ebersole who is a doll and with whom I have worked several times. I'm also looking forward to Donna Murphy being paired up with Jackie Hoffman to sing the show stopping The Grass is Always Greener from Woman of the Year.

Stephen Cole is a veteran of the Drama League benefits, and the importance of the organization still rings strong and true with him, "It's been around forever. I have written about 18 of these benefits. They award the oldest theatrical prize, the distinguished actor award. But most of all, this Director's Project has given the theatre (and continues to) many great directors who should be indebted to them for their careers."

Despite the bad economy, Cole makes an honest and reasonable case for buying tickets. "Well, this show is going to be great. For people who can afford to buy seats for the dinner and show (we are talking rich people here), its a great tax write off! They really are contributing to the future of the American Theater."

Cole has many fond memories of writing the Drama League shows over the years. His participation and friendship with the stars has led to some fantastic opportunities.

"I have had the pleasure of writing special material songs for many great artists, consequently getting to know and work with them further. People like Marlo Thomas (I write special songs for her to this day and I wrote

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That Book about That Girl because of our friendship), Tyne Daly, Christine Baranski, Liz

Smith, Chita Rivera (it was because of my tribute to her that I cast her in Casper), Rosie O'Donnell and others. It's been a joy to watch the parade of stars do incredible work first at the Pierre Hotel and now at the Rainbow Room. Being the writer of the event, I actually get to sit down and watch the show and like everyone else, I am looking forward to be dazzled on Feb. 2nd by an array of talent who donate their time...talent that you seldom see in one room. Stars that money can't buy! But they will all be there to honor Stewart and Bonnie and to help the Drama League. I will be very proud to be part of it."

When looking over Broadway's current crop of shows, Stephen Cole can pick modern highlights, "It's a hard thing to choose my favorites...since so many shows just closed. I really enjoyed *In the Heights* for it's vitality and heart. I loved *August Osage County* (saw it 3 times), but the best show would have to be *Billy Elliot* (I saw it twice in London and twice here). It's got it all. A very powerful book combined with unique staging. It's inspiring, serious, funny, exhilarating. What musical theater should be. Totally theatrical experience."

Tickets, priced \$900-\$2,500 - For more information visit www.dramaleague.org.

Proceeds benefit The Drama League - founded in 1916 as "an association of theater professionals and patrons dedicated to encouraging the finest in professional theater and has since then developed into the theater's premiere service organization."

Sources

www.dramaleague.org.

<http://www.stephencolewriter.com/>