



My Own Music

By Peter Ekstrom

People often ask me how I write music. Is it a gift from the gods? Is there some magic to it? My answer tends to be more down to earth: I followed

my own course of study.

I practiced to be a concert pianist until age 17. That was when the judges at the Ohio State Music Competitions lowered my scores because they didn't like my interpretation of a piece by Rachmaninoff. I was crushed and, frankly, a bit indignant. I vowed to write my own music so no one could ever again tell me the correct way to play it.

Off to college and into the spin-cycle of the late '60s. I came out a bona fide hippie with love beads and a guitar around my neck on which I wrote and sang folk songs. Then I rediscovered the popular music of the 1930s and '40s.

The complexity of classical music, the transparent chord progressions of folk music and the style and spirit of songs from the "golden age" of American song combined to become my curriculum for composing. The common element in these styles? Melody. My love of melody led me to concentrate on songwriting and musical theatre.

Strong melody has a potential to move an audience, to reach the soul. My concern is to communicate. And my latest musical, *Girl of My Dreams*, set in WWII during that golden age of song, is ready to do that – I hope!

You have to listen to your audience to be sure you *are* communicating. I had that opportunity when *Girl* was first done at the Barter Theatre in Virginia and in subsequent productions. Two years ago, Village Theatre presented the show in their Village Originals program. Since then, I've been working with my collaborators, lyricist Steve Hayes, librettist and lyricist David DeBoy, and Village Theatre's creative team (the best anywhere), pulling, pushing and polishing the show.

We're ready to let the Village Theatre's audiences meet our *Girl*. I hope that my music will entertain and, ultimately, *move* audiences. If my work does that, I'll be very happy and may conclude that there was some magic behind my journey as a composer after all. 🍷

VISITING
ARTIST



Where Remarkable and Obscure are Commonplace and Welcome

"Edgy" is not a word that Artistic Director Lane Czaplinski likes to use to describe the work at On the Boards. "About the time you aspire to be cool, hip or edgy" he says, "you have a hard time arriving there." Czaplinski is comfortable, though, with "risky" and "provocative." And, judging by leading market indicators, audiences are, too.

After 27 years, On the Boards is riding a wave of artistic accomplishment, strong attendance and unprecedented fundraising success. The secret, says Managing Director Sarah Wilke, is having an audience that "OtB," as the lower Queen Anne venue is fondly known, has nurtured over the course of its history. "Our audiences trust us and they will come no matter what," she says. "They come with the expectation that they'll be challenged and know they'll always find something in the season they can really respond to."

There's no question that OtB audiences sometimes have to stretch to appreciate what they see. Many productions are playful and accessible, but more often than not they require intense concentration and a capacity to be left a little mystified, if deeply moved, at the end. Whether the performance is music, dance or theater – and frequently it's a combination of all three – the viewer should come prepared to meet the artists halfway. And to see work that astonishes with its originality.

Czaplinski is constantly on the prowl for the best international artists whose work is creating major buzz or (perhaps even better) who are just coming into their own. He's also moving OtB forward as a champion of Northwest artists, commissioning more and more work by artists from Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Idaho and Montana. Farther afield, Czaplinski is on the lookout for artists from Asia and South America, which have vibrant creative communities that have not been widely represented at OtB.

Regardless of where the artist or company is from, Czaplinski has a coherent vision for what belongs at OtB. "I'm looking for intelligence," he says, "because our audiences are intelligent. And I want there to be a sense that the artists do one thing really well – even if it's not always obvious what that thing is." 🍷



Coming to On the Boards and guaranteed provocative:
(top) French "body artist" Christian Rizzo. (right) Seattle choreographer Zoe Scotland. (bottom) South African dance company The Floating Outfit Project, led by choreographer Boyzje Cakwana.