BAYONETS

of

ANGST

Selected for 2014 New York Musical Theater Festival

Production shots by Russ Rowland
When he heard in April that his musical, Bayonets of Angst, had been selected for inclusion in the 2014 New York Musical Theatre Festival, MSU and CAL theatre alumnus Rick Kunzi says, “It was a very big surprise.”

“At first, I thought it was for just a reading, but then they said, ‘We’d like you to do a full production.’ After that, basically, we became headliners!” Kunzi says.

An original musical comedy set to a bluegrass soundtrack, Bayonets of Angst is narrated by the last remaining veterans of the American Civil War. The musical’s promotional materials note: These old codgers detail the behind-the-battlefield exploits of President Lincoln, the madness of General Tecumseh Sherman, and the pickled promiscuity of General Ulysses S. Grant in a dizzying sequence of events that changed the course of history. And because they were “the ones who was there—you just listen and hush up ‘bout it!”

The show’s production’s credits read: Book by Rick Kunzi & Justin Zeppa; music by Rick Kunzi & Adam Barnosky; lyrics by Rick Kunzi. So it’s actual fact that Kunzi is totally invested in this one-hour-and-50-minute new musical.

“I wrote the music with my writing partner, Adam Barnosky, as well as the lyrics,” Kunzi says, “and share the book credit with Justin Zeppa, who I first met, believe it or not, during Summer Circle Theatre at MSU when we performed The Bean Stratagem together. We met, became friends, and I ended up living with him, and writing Bayonets of Angst.

“Adam, my music writing partner, also works on the orchestration, and Michael Lluberes is directing the show. Michael is originally from Okemos, Michigan, and was writer/director of the 2007 New York Musical Theater Festival selection The Boy in the Bathroom.”

Frank Rutledge’s Advice

Kunzi adds that the Bayonets of Angst music was recorded with a bluegrass band in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and, “After hearing it, Justin, Adam and I decided to adapt it for the stage.”

A student at MSU from 2000-2004, Kunzi says that he moved to New York City directly after graduation. “I still remember Frank Rutledge taking me aside one day and saying, ‘Listen. Computers are the next thing. You really ought to consider getting a computer science cognate.’ Frank always knew where theatre was moving.”

Now in his 10th year living and working there, three of them as an actor, Kunzi says Bayonets is his and Barnosky’s first musical, although the two have been writing together for 15 years. The show has been four years in the making, and they’ve had stage readings in Michigan and New York City, including off-Broadway at the American Theatre of Actors’ Chernuchin Theatre. So they’re both excited about staging the full production.

“The show was pretty well set for a while,” Kunzi says, “and then, Michael Lluberes and I sat down and began rewrites. It’s all played very much tongue-in-cheek: Men ride hobbyhorses around on stage (there are no women’s roles), and we use picture frames as props to introduce characters. All of which has us champing at the bit to add in sound effects!

Various Vibes

“In those respects, Bayonets of Angst is similar to Spam-a-lot,” Kunzi says. “But it also has a Brother, Where Art Thou? vibe, what with the bluegrass music. And it’s a bit like 39 Steps as there are seven actors who perform 65 different roles.

“Our experienced cast includes J. Robert Spencer and Paul Whitty who are on Broadway now, in Jersey Boys and Once, respectively, and Herndon Lackey of LoveMusik plays The Old Codger.”

Premiering at the Ford Foundation Studio Theatre at 480 W. 42nd Street on Wednesday, July 9, Bayonets of Angst was scheduled for seven performances through Wednesday, July 16.

“The next step?” Kunzi asks. “Perhaps a regional or off-Broadway run.”