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THEATER REVIEW



+ HEALTH & CLASSIFIED

SEE THIS THEATREZONE'S 'Bright Star' a hummable musical

> Harriet Howard Heithaus Naples Daily News USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

When you start looking up the lyrics to a song so you can replace the la-la-la-LA-la in your head with words, you suspect this musical is going to be staying around. Then you notice: Despite the short marquee moment on Broadway, there are already karaoke versions.

Despite the fact it only got a short marquee moment on Broadway, "Bright Star" has addictive melodies and the authenticity of a true story behind it.

So infectious is the title song that the cast reprised it for the curtain call at TheatreZone and the audience gladly kept time.

They also would have gladly sung along. Hence, the burrowing into themusiclyrics.com to cement them. (The musical continues this week; see the information box.)

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Alice Murphy (Kimberly Doreen Burns) rehearses for the TheatreZone's production of "Bright Star" on Monday, Feb. 7 at the G&L Theatre in Naples, Fla. CAITLYN JORDAN/NAPLES DAILY NEWS/USA TODAY NETWORK-FLORIDA

A Path for Hope: Sunday's concert promotes suicide-prevention with 15 bands

Charles Runnells Fort Myers News-Press USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Fritz Caraher didn't know what to say when his friend's son died of suicide last May.

Words failed him.

So instead of words, Caraher and other friends decided to take action. The result: A suicide-awareness concert Sunday featuring both national and local musical acts.

"It really started with I didn't have any words," says Caraher, a Fort Myers chef, musician and occasional concert promoter. "What do you say to a good friend who just lost their child?

"And having done fundraisers in the past, I didn't know what to say but I did know what I could do. And that's to try to help other families and people."

Fifteen bands will perform at the Path For Hope concert at Fort Myers' Pickle-N-Pub, including headliners Rob Snyder (a Nashville songwriter and a longtime friend of Caraher's) and Dave Hause (a Philadelphia singer-songwriter who Caraher calls "a punk rock legend").

A portion of the concert's proceeds will go to Valer-



Singer-songwriter Dave Hause is performing in Sunday's Path for Hope concert. PETER ACKERMAN

ie's House, a Fort Myers nonprofit that provides free counseling and other services for children grieving the death of a loved one. The childrens bereavement center started a separate group last year to help families left behind after suicide.

Suicide rates have increased by 35 percent since

1999, according to the CDC and the National Institute on Mental Health. So it's important to talk about it, says Angela Melvin, CEO and founder of Valerie's House.

"Suicide is all around us," Melvin says. "It happens much more often than people realize.

"I think that anytime you can say the word 'suicide,' it's important. It's the truth. It's what happens. We need to talk about it, and it needs to be brought up."

That's exactly what will happen during the Path for Hope concert. People will talk about suicide prevention onstage, including Melvin and emcee Caraher. Plus there will be tents where people can find information on warning signs, where to get help and more.

Then, of course, there's the music. The lineup includes:

• **Rob Snyder**, a Nashville songwriter whose country songs include Luke Combs' "She Got The Best Of Me" and "Six Feet Apart."

• Dave Hause, a Philadelphia-based folk/rock singer-songwriter who performs both solo and with his band The Mermaid. He's played in many

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'Bright Star'

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"Bright Star" is making its first rounds of regional theater in Florida, and TheatreZone is one of the lucky ones to have nearly all the orchestral talent for its American music right in Naples. (There's only one visitor: Those sweet fiddle licks come from Brittany Halen, a Houston-based actress-musician who got her own show here in "At the Movies!" last season.)

TheatreZone is also lucky to have as musical director Keith Thompson, who has national tours of musicals like "Mamma Mia!" and "Cabaret" under his belt. He knows when to bring out the ballad ("The Sun Is Gonna Shine") and when to let it twang, as in the flirty "Whoa, Mama!"

"Bright Star" has its own celestials: writers Edie Brickell and Steve Martin, who have become bluegrass luminaries above and their other onstage careers. We occasionally wish they had spent a little more time at the lyrics store, because there's more repetition than necessary in several songs. And although they wed authentic music to a true story, its requirements gave them little time to develop the relationships between characters.

Still, it's a treat of a musical, solidly attuned to its story and song parameters. No rap, no onstage pyrotechnics — just good material and casting in a work that requires its two main actors to age 20 years and presses everyone into solo spots.

Since this musical was in diapers, Kimberly Doreen Burns has had her sights on the central role of Alice Murphy, whose newborn is snatched from her by a grandfather determined to save his son's financially favorable marriage. She proves the perfect fit for the heroine determined to thrive, from a radiant 16-yearold to a jaded literary editor. Burns is dramatic without ever straying into soap opera, and those tears of joy in the story's climax are real.

Robert Koutras is a fine singer, athletic and emotive as Jimmy Ray Dobbs, Alice's doting, yet powerless, boy friend. But one looks at the couple and thinks she's the more likely candidate to be the mayor's progeny than he. The "Grease" hair desperately needs to be tamed.

There's not a weak character in this cast, and there are some zenith moments for nearly all:

• Both Quinn Corcoran (Billy) and Rachael Lord (Margo), with clear, sweet voices and fresh-faced enthusiasm that project the budding author who wants to be in Alice's Southern Journal and the bookstore manager who wants to be in Billy's life. His "Bright Star" is an instant ear worm, and she sings the show's most poignant song: "Asheville."

• Laura Whittenberger's effervescent Lucy, whose "Another Round" and her snappy banter with her workmate, Daryl, are lagniappe, that extra spice to send the story over the top. Robbie Rescigno (Darryl) is an engaging foil to her, arch and savvy and infuriating — and in his own perverse way, lovable.

• Paulette Oliva, as Alice's mother, who shares in



Daddy Cane (Brent D. Kuenning) and Billy Cane (Quinn Corcoran) rehearse for the TheatreZone's production of "Bright Star" on Monday, Feb. 7, at the G&L Theatre in Naples. CAITLYN JORDAN/NAPLES DAILY NEWS/USA TODAY NETWORK-FLORIDA

her daughter's losing war against fate. Still, she's a convincing maternal harbinger of hope with "The Sun Is Gonna Shine."

• Jim Ballard as the 90 percent bad guy, Jimmy Ray's father, who whisks Alice's baby away to what could be an awful fate. His miserable end and his surprising gift to Alice leave enough questions that we eventually understand why Jimmy Ray doesn't cut all ties to him.

Clever wood-hewn sets are whisked away or rotated to keep the pace, and Karen Molnar Danni's sunny dance scenes, snappy. Credit goes to Noelle Horldt, Tláloc Lopez Watermann and Mike Gambuto, production manager, scenic designer and assistant stage manager for those.

First credit goes to founding artistic director Mark Danni for bringing this one to Naples. Following a March production of Lerner and Loewe's "Camelot," he's planning another that Broadway shorted, "The Bridges of Madison County," in April 21.

After this production, we can't wait.

Harriet Howard Heithaus covers arts and entertainment for the Naples Daily News/naplesnews.com. Reach her at 239-213-6091. **What:** TheatreZone production of the award-winning musical based on a true story

When: 7:30 p.m. Feb. 17-20, 2 p.m. Feb. 19, 20

Where: G&L Theatre, Community School of Naples, 13275 Livingston Road, Naples. **Tickets:** \$50-\$85

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