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Charles Strouse

***Drowsy's* Martin and Nicholaw Are Adding Fizz to *Minsky's* Musical**

By *Kenneth Jones*

The Night They Raided Minsky's, the long-gestating musical comedy with songs by Tony Award-winner Charles Strouse and lyricist Susan Birkenhead, has new additional collaborators — director-choreographer Casey Nicholaw and Tony Award-winning librettist Bob Martin.

Nicholaw and Martin know from funny: They collaborated on the dizzy Broadway hit, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, which snagged Best Score and Best Book Tonys, as well as a nomination for Best Musical. Nicholaw is a three-time Tony nominee for choreographing *Spamalot* and for directing and choreographing *Drowsy*.

(Like *Drowsy*, *Minsky's* is a period piece, set in the Jazz Age.)

The Night They Raided Minsky's, which a decade ago had Mike Ockrent, Susan Stroman and librettist Evan Hunter on board with an eye toward a premiere at the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles, is still looking west to L.A., Playbill.com has learned. Producer Bob Boyett is attached to the property, and it's expected to be part of the Ahmanson's 2008-09 season, although no official announcement has been made.

The Drowsy Chaperone and the current Broadway musical *Curtains*, two tradition-friendly musical comedies, both got their start at the Ahmanson prior to Broadway.

Strouse, Birkenhead, Martin and Nicholaw have been working on *Minsky's* in Manhattan in recent months.

The musical's creation hit turbulence when *Crazy for You* and *Me and My Girl* director Ockrent — a champion of the show, as well as a co-conceiver — took ill. He was to stage an announced production at the Ahmanson Theatre in summer 2000, with wife Stroman choreographing, but he lost a battle with cancer in December 1999.

Center Theatre Group, which produces at the Ahmanson, has apparently kept the show on its wish list all these years.

"The Night They Raided Minsky's," the 1968 William Friedkin-directed film (co-written by Norman Lear and based on the novel by Rowland Barber), is about an Amish girl who causes a sensation when she inadvertently invents a striptease at the famous New York City burlesque palace, Minsky's. Jason Robards, Norman Wisdom and Britt Ekland starred. Strouse penned the soundtrack, which included songs with his longtime lyricist Lee Adams, his *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Golden Boy*, *Applause* collaborator.

The *Minsky's* stage musical has music by Strouse (*Annie*, *Rags*, *All American*, ...*Superman* and more) and lyrics by Birkenhead (*Jelly's Last Jam*). Evan Hunter ("Blackboard Jungle," "The Birds," and crime novels under the name Ed McBain) wrote an earlier version of the libretto. He died in 2005.

This is a big year for Strouse, a Broadway composer that many consider one of the last still-working practitioners of the boldly melodic show tune (think "Put on a Happy Face" and "Tomorrow"). He turns 80 on June 7; he'll see the publication of a memoir, "Put On a Happy Face," later this year; his songs are being celebrated Feb. 6 in a Lincoln Center "American Songbook" concert at the Allen Room; and Encores! is staging a revival of his Tony Award-winning *Applause* (written with lyricist Adams and librettists Betty Comden and Adolph Green), Feb. 7-10.

For more information about Charles Strouse, visit www.charlesstrouse.com.

