

The Addams Family revamped for touring

TORONTO (CP) — Several esteemed stars have played the macabre married couple in The Addams Family musical on Broadway, first Bebe Neuwirth and Nathan Lane, and now Brooke Shields and Roger Rees.

But that doesn't faze the lead actors in the touring production, who note their version now playing in Toronto is far different from the one in New York and allows them to make their own pioneering mark on death-loving duo Morticia and Gomez Addams.

"One of the reasons why I decided to take the job was that they wanted to make a lot of changes and that interests me, to sort of get in on the ground floor where things are being created rather than just take over a role," said Tony Award-nominated actor Douglas Sills, 51, who plays Gomez in the touring show.

"You get to discover it, you get to find it. It's like an archaeological dig as opposed to putting on someone else's costume, particularly someone as illustrious as Nathan Lane or as Roger Rees. That's a no-win. Who wants to step into those shoes, right?"

"It really was as though we were building it from the ground up," noted Tony nominee Sara Gettelfinger, 34, who plays Morticia in the tour.

"I was able to see Bebe Neuwirth perform the role and she's incredible in everything she does, but it was really exciting to be able to use my own instrument and my own take on it and make a new mould for what it is that I do."

The touring musical comedy – which Dancap Productions is running at the Toronto Centre for the Arts through Nov. 27 – is based on cartoonist Charles Addams' oddball characters who first came to life in TV and film.

With a book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice (Jersey Boys), and music and lyrics by Andrew Lippa, the show debuted to tepid reviews as a tryout run in Chicago before opening on Broadway in April 2010.

Sills said the creative team, which also includes Toronto-raised choreographer Sergio Trujillo, made "cataclysmic changes" to the production in Chicago.

But they didn't have enough time to craft it into exactly what they wanted before it hit Broadway, where it got two Tony nominations last year and is set to close on Dec. 31.

With this touring production, they've added a major plot point, new scenes and changed some of the songs and choreography.

Now the show is "much sturdier and more interesting, both to act in and to watch," said Sills, who calls this incarnation True Blood meets All in the Family.

"This is the version that will be published," said the Detroit native, noting Disney is now revamping some of its musicals that have been in New York, so "Broadway is not the 'be all and end all'" anymore.

Rousing student protest opera has U.S. premiere

NEW YORK (AP) — Just two nights after New York City police broke up the Occupy Wall Street encampment in lower Manhattan, a new opera about student protest movements around the world had its U.S. premiere uptown at Lincoln Center.

And as if to underscore the connection, the performance at the Juilliard School on Wednesday drew a small group of demonstrators who stood behind police barricades holding signs and chanting "Off the stage, into the streets!"

The opera is Kommilitonen! with music by the British composer Peter Maxwell Davies and libretto by David Pountney, who also directed.

In a program note, Pountney said they took student activism as their subject because, when they set to work back in 2008, it seemed the phenomenon had vanished.

Well, the world has certainly changed – even since the opera was first performed last March by the Royal Academy of Music in London, which co-commissioned it.

Headlines aside, Kommilitonen! is an earnest and engaging creation, an agitprop pageant that proves surprisingly entertaining. Moreover, the Juilliard Opera singers and orchestra, led by conductor Anne Manson, performed it with an enthusiasm and polish that had the 77-year-old composer beaming when he came out for his curtain call.

Pountney has woven together three separate stories, beginning with the White Rose movement, in which a small group of German students risked their lives to distribute propaganda protesting Nazi atrocities.

The opera's name comes from a term they used in their final leaflet (shortly before they were captured and guillotined), which roughly translates as Fellow students!

The second story tells of James Meredith's crusade to become the first black student to register at the University of Mississippi in 1962; an individual act of courage that helped galvanize years of civil rights struggle.

The third story, a counterpoint to show the excesses of youthful zeal, is set during China's Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and depicts the children of a local official who denounce their parents as politically impure. The narratives unfold in alternating fashion throughout the first act in brief, brisk scenes.

The second half begins on a sombre, philosophical note with a resulting drop in energy, until the stories merge and the whole ensemble joins in a stirring anthem to end on an optimistic note.

Davies' lifetime of experience writing large-scale compositions shows in his expert use of the orchestra. The rhythmically varied, basically tonal score is filled with snatches of melody that hint at Chinese marches, American spirituals and German lieder – tunes that often melt into one another.

In a compelling moment during the interrogation of the Chinese parents, a relentlessly upbeat chorus for the Red Guard plays against a string lament for the hapless victims.

Among the standouts in the young cast, baritone Will Liverman showed terrific presence and a solid voice as James Meredith, the most fully developed character; soprano Deanna Breiwick sang sweetly as Sophie Scholl, leader of the White Rose; and mezzo-soprano Wallis Giunta made the plight of the Chinese son painfully sympathetic.

There are two more performances this Friday evening and Sunday afternoon.

Chemistry between Like Crazy stars Felicity Jones, Anton Yelchin was real

Nick PATCH
The Canadian Press

TORONTO — With all its whispered pillow-talk and near-suffocating intimacy, Like Crazy would have been a tough movie to make if stars Anton Yelchin and Felicity Jones didn't genuinely like one another.

Fortunately, the pair found a real-life chemistry that fuelled their onscreen union.

"Serendipitously, we just got along," Yelchin said during an interview at September's Toronto International Film Festival.

"We just were friends, we got along and that obviously helped. If we met and had not liked each other, we would have had a problem. But we got along, we connected."

While actors are usually fond of dismissing the relevance of real-life relationships - they're actors, after all - Jones similarly attributed the intensity of the film's romantic connection to a closeness fostered by 15-hour rehearsal sessions and a rigorous shooting schedule.

"I think just by spending 24 hours a day with each other, we couldn't help but seem intimate," she laughed. "Well, it was just a very intense period of shooting, and we were literally shooting all day and all night."

"So you quickly become very familiar with people."

Filmgoers are similarly growing accustomed to the young stars of Like Crazy.

The film - which has already opened in select cities and will expand into theatres in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa on Friday - focuses on a passionate young couple (Jones and Yelchin) forced into a long-distance relationship due to a bureaucracy headache caused by an overstayed visa.

It was one of the darlings of the Sundance Film Festival this year, primarily



CP PHOTO

With all its whispered pillow-talk and impossible intimacy, Like Crazy would have been a tough movie to make if stars Anton Yelchin and Felicity Jones didn't genuinely like one another.

thanks to the sterling performances from Jones and Yelchin at the film's centre.

And with Oscar nominee and fellow rising star Jennifer Lawrence also playing a supporting role in the heart-breaking romantic drama, writer-director Drake Doremus acknowledges that he was pretty lucky to assemble such a stellar young cast.

"They're all wonderful actors," Doremus said during the Toronto film festival. "Really awesome and young actors. I'm excited to see what they do."

"I'm really proud of them - they're wonderful humans."

The Russian-born Yelchin, however, might have come into the film with the highest profile - he portrays Pavel Chekov in the rebooted Star Trek film series, and also headed up the recent Fright Night remake - yet that didn't seem to inspire any vanity.

In fact, Yelchin had a hand in crafting his character in the mostly improvised

film, and wanted the passage of time and increasingly taxing relationship stress to take its toll.

He chose to gain weight for the film and decided that his character's hairline would inch higher and higher as years pass in the film. The actor even worried over his character's wardrobe, wanting his sartorial choices to reflect the shifts in his personality.

As the film goes on, Yelchin's character grows increasingly weary of the romantic hurdles he's trying to overcome, and the 22-year-old actor - far more ebullient than his onscreen counterpart - said he delighted in exploring his darker side.

"I loved it because the character is so different for me, so quiet, and so passive aggressive - insanely passive aggressive," said Yelchin, clad in a slim-fitting suit.

"It's probably the most magical thing I've ever been a part of as an actor. It's the most free and kind of unbelievable experience."

Nikki Reed prepares for post-Twilight job search

Nicole EVATT The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Twilight might be paying Nikki Reed's bills now, but the actress says she's ready to start looking for her next gig.

"These movies, as great as they are and as huge as they are, they don't just spoon-feed you careers. It's like you still have to go and bust your butt and work just like everybody else," the 23-year-old actress said in an interview Wednesday in New York.

Reed's character, Edward Cullen's sister Rosalie Hale, takes on a more prominent role in the latest installment, the first of a two-part finale being released in theatres Friday.

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn - Part 1 finds Rosalie teaming with Bella (Kristen Stewart) to protect Bella's half-vampire baby who's growing quickly and violently inside the human teenager.

Reed's post-Twilight plans include pursuing more comedic roles, though she worries fans are used to seeing her as the serious, standoffish vampire she's played since the saga debuted

in 2008.

"You know, I play very bold, very confident women, and I'm so different from the characters that I play. But it's true that people can't separate you," she said, noting that many people are surprised by her sense of humour.

Reed first entered the Hollywood scene in 2003 as a screenwriter for the film Thirteen, loosely based on Reed's experiences with drugs, sex and self-harming in junior high. It starred Evan Rachel Wood, and Reed played a supporting role.

Reed has also dabbled in music with her husband of one month, American Idol alumnus Paul McDonald. The newlyweds recently released a duet, Now That I Found You, which Reed wrote.

The final chapter, The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn - Part 2, is slated for release in November 2012.

Online: www.breakingdawn-themovie.com

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