

Musical awakening

By Evan Henerson
Theater Writer

Rock band GrooveLily takes center stage for now

The director of "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" is a veteran stage hand with Broadway experience. Its playwright won a Tony. The two co-presenting theater companies — Center Theatre Group and Deaf West Theatre — certainly know what playmaking is all about.

In fact, the members of the creative team who are still a bit green to this genre are — somewhat ironically — the composers.

This stands to reason. In their other incarnation, composer/lyricists Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda are two-thirds of the rock band GrooveLily. And right now, the theater world seems to want GrooveLily more than the music industry.

"We stopped trying to get a record deal," says Milburn, the band's keyboardist. "And then we got a record deal from a theatrical label."

The band had already been scaling back on its concerts and steadily moving into the world of live theater. A GrooveLily-scored musical — like its maiden effort, "Striking 12" — also comes with the performers on stage, incorporated into the action.

So it's come to pass that the Brooklyn-based Milburn and Vigoda have been rehearsing in L.A. since February, boning up on both their American Sign Language and their acting. "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" opens at the Kirk Douglas Theatre this weekend.

As far as "Beauty Wakes" director Jeff Calhoun is concerned, the pop/rock world's temporary loss is live theater's gain.

"(Milburn and Vigoda's) is not a sound we've heard in the theater before. I'm not smart enough to be able to name it, but they're unique, and finding a unique voice like this is something to celebrate," Calhoun says.

Wearing lots of hats

The husband and wife composers — parents to an 18-month-old son, Mose, as well as bandmates — fully intend to celebrate ... once the lyrics and arrangements are all hammered out, once their "Beauty Wakes" roles are learned. It's a lot of work wearing creator and player hats, but Vigoda and Milburn aren't exactly griping.

"There's so much more you



GrooveLily — Shannon Ford, left, Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda — perform in the world premiere of "Sleeping Beauty Wakes," through May 13 at the Kirk Douglas Theatre.

can do when you're liberated from just telling your own story," Vigoda says. "Instead of talking about your own breakup or boyfriends, suddenly you're telling the story of 'Sleeping Beauty' or Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Match Girl.' There's just a whole world out there of more exciting work."

"Match Girl" was the basis for "Striking 12," the band's first attempt at concertized storytelling written with Rachel Sheinkin, the writer of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee." GrooveLily broke out a 45-minute showcase version of the three-person musical in 2004 at the National Alliance for Musical Theatre.

With Milburn, Vigoda and drummer Gene Lewin doubling as both the musicians and the only performers, the show was one of the hits of the festival. When a full production finally reached New York last year, The New York Times' Charles Isherwood lauded "Striking 12" and "Spring Awakening" composer Duncan Sheik for "inspir-

ing hope that musical theater, long considered to be on life support, may yet make a recovery fueled by musical transfusions from the more eclectic players in the pop and rock spheres."

Like a fairy tale

Former Deaf West managing director Bill O'Brien saw "Striking 12" at the NAMT, and broached the idea of a collaboration between Deaf West and GrooveLily with the band producing songs that the deaf and partially deaf actors would perform.

"We thought it would be interesting if something ever came of it, but we never expected it to," says Milburn. "Then, in late 2005, Deaf West had gotten this huge grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and they had to have something to present in front of a paying audience at the end of June 2006."

O'Brien's directive: Base the new work on a fairy tale and have the band members mix with deaf and partially deaf

SLEEPING BEAUTY WAKES

Where: Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd., Culver City.
When: 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday, 2 and 7 p.m. Sunday; through May 13.
Some weeknight performances. Call for exact schedule.
Tickets: \$20 to \$50. (213) 628-2772
www.centertheatregroup.org.

actors. GrooveLily spitballed a modern-day take on "Rumpelstiltskin," but book writer Sheinkin suggested "Sleeping Beauty" set in a present-day sleep-disorders clinic instead.

The workshoped version played Deaf West's small North Hollywood theater. At that point, "Beauty Wakes" was rough around the edges but well-received, and a full commission followed.

Coming off a conceptual staging of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in New Jersey (the band recently cut a concept album from the production), Vigoda says GrooveLily appears to be establishing a pattern "of doing shows that we can perform in our pajamas."

Return to roots

For Milburn, moving into theater is actually something of a full-circle return. Graduating from Pomona College, he attended graduate school at New York University's Musical Theater Writing Program (a couple of years ahead of eventual writing partner Sheinkin). Leaving graduate school and finding himself daunted by the New York musical theater scene, Milburn instead hooked up with a girl rock band fronted by Vigoda.

He had caught their act and was smitten by both the music and the violinist/lead singer, Vigoda. One slight obstacle stood in the way.

"She thought I was gay," Milburn says of Vigoda. "I was all into musical theater, I came from San Francisco, this sensitive new-age guy. So it took a while to sort of progress past that."

"Even before we started dating, we were writing lyrics together," adds Vigoda. "One of our first misunderstandings was when he asked me out for coffee. I thought, 'Is this a date?' He said, 'I want to talk you out for coffee and talk about songwriting.' He really did, and it was all business. We talked about songwriting, we got to know each other, and that's the way we still are."

Evan Henerson, (818) 713-3651
evan.henerson@dailymovie.com

LAEMMLE THEATRES
Bargain Shows in L.A. www.laemml.com

TOWN CENTER 5 818/981-9811
17200 VENTURA BLVD., ENCINO

On 2 Screens
BLACK BOOK (12:40 1:20) 3:30 4:40 7:00 8:00 10:09 (R)

THE TV SET (12:25) 2:45 5:05 7:25 9:45 (R)

AFTER THE WEDDING (1:15) 4:10 7:10 9:55 (R)

MEHMAN 12:05 2:35 5:05 7:35 10:05 (NR)

FALLBROOK 7 818/340-8710
6731 FALLBROOK AVE., WEST HILLS

THE LIVES OF OTHERS (1:40) 5:00 8:10 (R)

THE NAMESAKE (1:00) 4:00 7:00 9:55 (PG-13)

THE HOAX (11:30) 2:10 4:55 7:40 10:15 (R)

FIREHOUSE DOG (11:30) 2:00 4:40 7:30 10:10 (PG)

REIGN OVER ME 4:10 7:10 10:30 (R)

THE LAST MIMZY (1:30) (PG)

MEET THE ROBINSONS (11:30) 2:20 4:50 7:20 9:50 (G)

THE WIND THAT SHAKES THE BARRIE (12:45) 3:45 7:00 9:55 (NR)

PACIFIC THEATRES

1000 HAYS • 10000 641.600.0000 (ASK FOR TICKETS AND SEATING AVAILABLE AT ADVANCE TICKETS ONLY)

SPIDER-MAN 2
Opens May 4. Advance tickets now on sale!

GALLERIA STADIUM 16 7 &
Sherman Oaks Galleria (818) 501-5121 (8037)
Ventura and Sepulveda, Off 405 Fwy
Parking Off Centerline/4 Bay On-Site Free Validated Parking

THE HOAX (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
GRINDHOUSE (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
ARE WE DONE YET? (PG) - On 2 Screens
THE REAPING (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
BLADES OF GLORY (PG-13) - On 2 Screens
MEET THE ROBINSONS (G) - On 2 Screens
300 (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:55) 4:50 7:50 10:30
TINNY (PG) (12:10) 2:35 4:50 7:25 9:50
SHOOTER (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
BEHOLD OVER ME (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
THE LOOKOUT (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:25) 2:45 5:00 7:35 10:25
THE NAMESAKE (PG-13) In Suburban (11:30) 4:40 7:25 10:20

SHERMAN OAKS 5 7 &
Milbank at Van Ness (818) 501-5121 (8037)

MEET THE ROBINSONS (G) - On 2 Screens
WILD HOGS (PG-13) (12:00) 4:35 7:10 9:50
THE LAST MIMZY (PG) (12:10) 4:45 7:30 10:20
I THINK I LOVE MY WIFE (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
THE HILLS HAVE EYES 2 (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20

WINNETKA STADIUM 21 7 &
Winnetka at Prairie (818) 501-5121 (8037)

THE HOAX (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
GRINDHOUSE (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
ARE WE DONE YET? (PG) - On 2 Screens
THE REAPING (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
FIREHOUSE DOG (PG) - On 2 Screens
BLADES OF GLORY (PG-13) - On 2 Screens
MEET THE ROBINSONS (G) - On 3 Screens
300 (R) - ID REQUIRED 4:25 7:25 10:25
TINNY (PG) (11:05) 3:15 5:25 7:50 10:05
SHOOTER (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:40 7:40 10:25
WILD HOGS (PG-13) (1:20) 4:15 7:10 10:10
PROMETHEUS (PG-13) 7:10 9:50
REIGN OVER ME (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
THE LAST MIMZY (PG) (11:25) 2:35 5:25 7:50 10:20
THE LOOKOUT (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
I THINK I LOVE MY WIFE (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
THE HILLS HAVE EYES 2 (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
DEAD SILENCE (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20

300 (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:25) PM

HOUGHTON FASHION CENTER STADIUM 10 7 &
Shirley and Phammer (818) 501-5121 (8037)

GRINDHOUSE (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
ARE WE DONE YET? (PG) - On 2 Screens
THE REAPING (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:45 7:40 10:20
FIREHOUSE DOG (PG) - On 2 Screens
BLADES OF GLORY (PG-13) - On 2 Screens
MEET THE ROBINSONS (G) - On 2 Screens
300 (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:40) 4:40 7:35 10:05
TINNY (PG) (12:15) 2:45 5:00 7:35 10:10
SHOOTER (R) - ID REQUIRED (1:50) 4:40 7:40 10:20
WILD HOGS (PG-13) (12:40) 3:35 7:30 10:10

SHOWTIMES FOR 7/27/07 ONLY • BARGAIN SHOWS IN L.A.

Kids Driving you crazy?

Drive them to the movies.