POZ Biz-December 1996/January 1997

January 1, 1997 By Erik Meers

Rent Destabilized?

Miramax moves in on the Broadway hit's film rights only to be evicted by its producers

Miramax Films and movie companies associated with Robert De Niro and Martin Scorsese thought in late August that they had won the bidding war for film rights to the AIDS-themed musical *Rent*. They had, after all, signed a deal with the heirs of the show's late author: Jonathan Larson. But Miramax had no sooner issued a breathless press release than the Broadway producers nixed the agreement, saying that any contract was contingent on their approval.

The motivation for the machinations isn't hard to figure out. With bidding for the film rights in the millions of dollars, the four Broadway producers-Jeffrey Seller, Allan Gordon, Kevin McCollum and the New York Theater Workshop-could get a sizable take for their haggling.

"The movie is going to happen, and it is going to happen with those companies," a spokesperson for the show told *POZ* Biz. "The final details of the deal have not been ironed out. The movie deal was announced before [the Broadway producers] had beeen talked to at all. No deal is complete without them signing off on it."

Miramax tersely commented, "We are currently in the process of working these issues out."

Though the undisclosed price offered by Miramax was reportedly not the highest big, the studio's strong ties to New York City are among the reasons that the Larson family selected it. Miramax, acquired by Disney in 1993, gained prominence by finding large audiences for art-house films such as *The Crying Game* and *Pulp Fiction*. Though no deal had been struck as *POZ* went to press, the lawyers aren't strapped for time become one non-negotiable term of the deal is a three-year embargo provision on the film so that *Rent: The Movie* won't sap audiences from the Broadway show. But with money continuing to roll in after a cast performance at the Democratic National Convention and a newly released album, new *Rent* wars on other fronts seem inevitable.

Television

Viet Condom

The glorification of the condom is the unlikely theme of a new television drama series being

produced for Vietnamese TV by the country's communist government. Funded by a $1.2 million grant from the European Union, the series, with the catchy title *The Wind Blows Through Dark* and *Bright Areas*, will focus on AIDS prevention. The Vietnamese government acknowledges that more than 4,200 HIV cases have been reported since the first person was diagnosed in 1990. "The show is part of the country's combined efforts to fight the most deadly disease of the century," said the Vietnam News Agency, the government's official information organ. "It will have around 30 episodes featuring life in the modern world, with all its day-to-day problems, designed to warn local people of HIV/AIDS and other social evils."

Theater

Hoof Couture

Barbra Streisand with a toucan beak and bamboo fingernails. A cowboy with feather chaps and strobing electric stars. A hat displaying the New York City skyline with a taxi and helicopter whizzing around its brim. These are just some of the loony creations popping from the mind of costume-design genius Howard Crabtree. Although the artist died at 41, on June 28, after a lengthy battle with AIDS, Crabtree's big-hearted wackiness lives on in his last work, *Howard Crabtree's When Pig's Fly*, which recently opened Off-Broadway to rousing reviews from the National Press.

A Missouri native, Crabtree first became professionally involved in the theater as a chorus member in a 1977 Las Vegas show. But it was not until he began working for the Atlantic Ballet of Canada in Toronto that Crabtree found his true calling. He moved on to Broadway working as a dresser for *La Cage aux Folles*, *Starlight Express, Legs Diamond* and *The Phantom of the Opera.* Backstage at *La Cage,* Crabtree met a chorus singer named Mark Waldrop, the man who would become his collaborator on five different shows over 10 years.

The two soon turned a campy routine dreamed up in their off-hours into the cabaret act *Howard and Drew Meet the Invisible Man*. "We would just brainstorm funny ideas and then somehow, issues percolating in us would rise to the top like cream" Waldrop told *POZ* Biz. "We would find that we had written this funny number, but it was really about an issue like self-acceptance." *The Invisible Man*, for example, is a gay man's coming-out story. Crabtree, for one, certainly got the message: He came out to his parents soon after the show went up. Professional recognition was also forthcoming. Crabtree won a Drama Desk Award for outstanding achievement in costume design for *Howard Crabtree's Whoop-Dee-Doo!*, which he created on a measly production budget of $35,000.

True to form, Crabtree spent his last days appending toilet-bowl brushed to showgirl uniforms to ensure that *Pigs* would live up to his vision. Ironically, it was the first show in which he had a substantial budget to play with. And play he did. When hoofs for a centaur costume finally arrived, Crabtree rose from bed, slipped on the hoofs and mugged for his home audience. "He wanted to see our reaction. I would say that the show is what kept him alive the last few months of his life. He loved to see an audience scream," Waldrop says. "What we really wanted to do with this show

is take this kind of humor-that gay people have always gotten-and let a general audience go there and see how much fun it is. He would have seen *[Pigs*] as a stepping stone to the next thing. He had a big plan. He wanted to be the gay Jim Henson/Walt Disney. He knew the show was going to work, and he was so happy about that.

SHORT TAKES

A super man able to attract superstar power? Apparently so. Fresh from his stirring speech at the Democratic National Convention, **Christopher Reeve** has cast some of the biggest names in Hollywood for his modest directorial debut, *In the Gloaming*, an hour-long HBO film about a PWA who returns home to live with his parents. To date, Reeve has signed Broadway star **Robert Sean Leonard** as the PWA, **Glenn Close** as his mother, **Bridget Fonda** as his sister and **Whoopi Goldberg** as his nurse. The movie will air early next year.

They were ready for Freddy in Venice. Queen lead singer **Freddie Mercury**, who died of AIDS in 1991, is featured in the film *Made in Heaven*, which was warmly received at the Venice Film Festival in late August. The movie, a compilation of seven short films, was produced by the British Film Institute. No word yet on a U.S. release.

Director **Tom Kalin** is in preproduction on *Somebody's Sins*, a movie about the life of photographer **Robert Mapplethorpe.** The film will not focus on Mapplethorpe's death from AIDS or the skewering he received from Jesse Helms, but on his relationship with rocker **Patti Smith** in the early '70s. "There will be very little if anything about AIDS," says *Sins* executive producer Stephanie Davis. "It's going to focus on the positive elements of the early '70s-great freedom, creativity, interesting sexualities, unusual friendships, that sort of thing. It's a positive movie about creative people." Kalin gained a reputation for taking his movies in unusual directions with *Swoon*, in which he explored a 1924 murder trial as a love story. Both **Keanu Reeves** and **Stephen Dorff** have been mentioned for the lead role.

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