

Capital Playhouse plans heady plays

By Molly Gilmore

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This season, Capital Playhouse's lineup is studded with the work of Stephen Sondheim, Rodgers and Hammerstein -- and Bertolt Brecht.

Brecht's "The Threepenny Opera" (Oct. 9-Nov. 1) opens the season. "It's a really heady, dark piece," said Jeff Kingsbury, the theater's artistic director. "Of course, people will recognize 'Mac the Knife,' but in the context of the show, it's not Frank Sinatra. It's thieves and murderers and prostitutes.

"It's a very seedy, decadent piece, and of course, I love that kind of stuff," Kingsbury said, laughing. The show's darkness suits the Halloween season and echoes the tone of last year's "Sweeney Todd." The latter show was "overwhelmingly successful," Kingsbury said.

"Doing that project really gave us the impetus to go ahead and do 'The Threepenny Opera,' which we've wanted to do for years," he added. "We weren't sure that our local audiences' palates were ready for it, but 'Sweeney Todd' tells us that the time is right."

Another play with an intellectual pedigree will end the season: Sondheim's "A Little Night Music" (May 7-30), which has been the playhouse's most requested production. "It's the 'Send in the Clowns' musical," Kingsbury said. "Our audiences seem to like Sondheim very, very much."

He said the playhouse has not previously wanted to do the show, based on an Ingmar Bergman film, because it has many locations and requires period costumes, making it a costly production.

"It's an elegant show and very classy and at the same time good-humored and intellectual," he said. "It gives you something to talk about. And it's an actor's dream show.

"It's a really interesting exploration into relationships and why they work or do not work, and what is morality. There are all kinds of really interesting intellectual topics, but it's a very funny piece," he said.

Also part of the season: the holiday show "Scrooge" (Nov. 28-Dec. 21), starring Kingsbury, and "Jesus Christ Superstar" (March 19-April 11), which has heavy themes.

"Certainly, the bookends of the season are much more heady," Kingsbury said. "In a typical season, we might do one heady piece."

But Kingsbury said he's most excited about "A Grand Night for Singing" (Jan. 29-Feb. 21), a revue of Rodgers and Hammerstein songs. "It's a very sophisticated presentation of that material," he said. "They're taking numbers out of their regular context and putting them into really unique and interesting presentations.

"We've wanted to do something from Rodgers and Hammerstein, and they typically only do epics," he added. "In our space, we really can't do 'The Sound of Music.' "