

FootLights

CURTAIN CALL

ILLUMINATING THE THEATER COMMUNITY

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THE HOME GROWN MUSICAL



DIVORCE! THE MUSICAL!

Erin Kamler merges her story, a woman's perspective and Women's Studies to find her voice.

If you've ever gone through a divorce, and sadly many have, it's probably not an experience that you want to sing and dance about. For most, it's a life transforming experience, leaving depression and loneliness in its wake. For Erin Kamler, from the roots of despair rose humor and maybe even a lesson or two. Her own divorce inspired *Divorce the Musical*, an ensemble show with a cast of five playing numerous roles. Kamler is also working on another show which started much earlier and is still in progress, a project in New York, *Runway 69*, winner of the 2008 Frederick Loewe Award, with a cast of twenty-two and a full orchestra.

Erin Kamler started writing musicals at the age of nine in her native Ann Arbor, Michigan. Since that time she has never stopped, first attending University of Michigan, and later Sarah Lawrence, a move she calls "a means of getting to New York." An accomplished recording artist, Erin has also been part of the creative team on several musicals that have been produced in New York, including *Dissolving Elsa* and *Eleven*.

Runway 69 has been in the works for five years and is just now getting its preliminary readings. *Divorce the Musical* began about two years ago and will be opening at the Hudson Mainstage this coming Valentine's Day. According to Erin, the scrutiny of New York is more intense, lots of eyes making the process more arduous. "Los Angeles is more open, more accepting, providing a greater degree of freedom."

The draw of a musical for Erin is the symbiosis of music and character. Music being a language that everyone understands. And then there's characters and dialogue, which at times can be a bit more obtuse. Organically mix these and there's a magic. There's a subtle identification of character with musical motif, a texture, not dissimilar to an accent of phrase pattern. It helps define the character and sends a particular message to the audience.

Another appeal of musicals for Erin is that although theatre by definition is a collaborative art, musicals are more so. There is a constant give and take between the writer, director, choreographer, musical director, and of course the performers, that



when properly managed creates memorable works. The complexity of a musical is like a puzzle and the team brings it all together to create the picture.

Then there's subject matter. *Divorce the Musical* is pretty self-explanatory. *Runway 69* is the story of a strip club in New York in the early 90's. If you throw in an earlier work, *Dissolving Elsa*, a story of a young girl struggling with her secrets, a pattern begins to emerge. The hours spent on Women's Studies while at Sarah Lawrence have certainly had their influence.

Grasping and wrestling with the tougher issues of life, and then putting them into musicals fosters Erin Kamler and supports her hopes to shed a little light on life's darker moments. ■