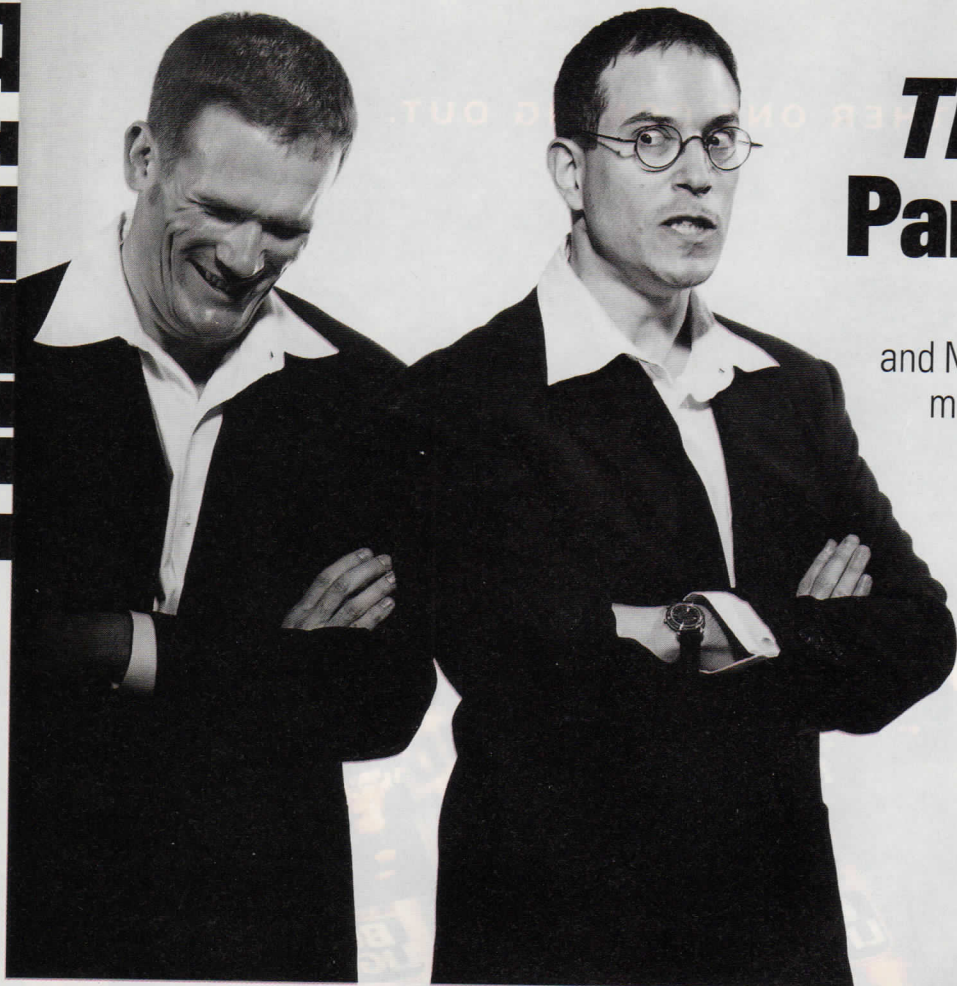


Triumph of Partnership

The team of Mayer and Magruder cook up a new musical for Betty Buckley.



EVERYTHING SEEMS to be coming up roses this fall for playwright James Magruder and director Michael Mayer. They're set to make their debut on Broadway, with Mayer directing *Triumph of Love*, a new musical with a book by Magruder and a star turn by Betty Buckley, beginning performances at New York's Walter Kerr Theater on September 16. And Mayer is already preparing to direct his second Broadway production, a revival of Arthur Miller's *A View From the Bridge*, opening in December. The irony is, the duo's *Triumph of Love* is for the moment restricted to the stage. "Let's just say we both need dates for opening night," says Magruder.

The story of the two men's stage-bound *Triumph* dates back to 1987, when Magruder, then a Yale graduate

student, made the first-ever English translation of Pierre Marivaux's *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*, the 1732 French comedy. "Marivaux invented the stages of how you fall in love," says Magruder, "and he created this language of love which, though beautifully phrased, is neurotic and full of emotional tics."

Mayer directed Magruder's adaptation off-Broadway in 1994—the same year he got his big break, directing the national tour of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. Enthusiastic over Mayer's Marivaux production, *Angels* co-producer Margo Lion wanted to bring the play to a wider audience, perhaps adapting it for the screen. "I said it should be a musical," says Mayer. "I remembered we had opened the second act with a Cole Porter song and it worked so well. And Magruder knows more about musicals than anybody I know."

"I wanted to be a Broadway chorus boy; I would have killed to be in *On Your Toes*," laughs Magruder, who nearly

chucked French literature for the gypsy life. He marvels that the current Broadway show is a "weird culmination" of an unabated "22 years of serious show-queendom."

With a score by Jeffrey Stock and lyrics by Susan Birkenhead, *Triumph of*

Love is a show queen's wet dream: young love, cross-dressing, several seductions—and, of course, Dame Buckley, playing the crusty sister to a philosopher (F. Murray Abraham) who has taught his handsome young charge (Christopher Sieber) to hate and fear sex. In trying to win over the youth, the princess heroine (Susan Egan, the sultry siren in Disney's *Hercules*) must first disguise herself as a man and woo Buckley's spinster.

"Seduction is a very musical event and love is always something to sing about," says Magruder, who describes *Triumph of Love* as a cross between *A Little Night Music* and *The Boys From Syracuse*, two other songfests adapted from nonmusical classics. "And a bit of *The Marriage of Figaro*," adds Mayer. Referring to the musical's gender games and postmodern aesthetic, he declares, "This is definitely theater of the fabulous!" Now, is there a potential boyfriend or two in the house?

—GERARD RAYMOND

"Magruder knows more about musicals than anyone," says Mayer (right) of his collaborator.