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Hell in a Handbag Productions takes you inside the dark world of *women in prison* in a tale so shocking, so horrific and so perverse, only Hell in a Handbag would dare set it to music! The world premiere of

Caged Dames

Book, Music & Lyrics by David Cerda
Musical Direction by Andra Velis Simon
Choreography by Shawn Quinlan
Directed by Scott Bradley

Bailiwick Repertory Theatre

1229 W. Belmont Ave.

Preview: Oct. 17, 8pm Preview Admission: \$10

Opens: Wednesday, Oct. 18, 8pm Admission: \$20 w/reception

JUST ADDED: Oct. 19, 8pm, Roar Foundation/Shambala Preserve benefit performance with a pre-show reception with the legendary Hitchcock actress Tippi Hedren!

Admission: \$35, includes pre-show reception with Tippi Hedren at Joey's Brickhouse, 1228 W. Belmont, 6:00-7:30pm

Runs until Nov. 19: Thurs. 8pm, Fri. 9:15pm, Sat. 7:00pm, Sun. 3pm- *NOTE THE TIMES*

Admission: \$20

For reservations call the The Bailiwick Repertory Theatre box office at (773)883-1090 or Ticketmaster at www.ticketmaster.com

High resolution press pictures, bios and interviews available at www.handbagproductions.org

For additional information call the Handbag hotline @ 312/409-4357

Chicago, IL - *Caged Dames*, a shocking new musical in two acts comes from the mind of Chicago's David Cerda, author of the critically acclaimed *POSEIDON! An Upside- Down Musical* and *The Birds* (A Feminist Drag Hitchcock Deconstruction). *Caged Dames* marks Cerda's first new musical in 4 years, inspired by the black and white noir prison films of the 40's and 50's, particularly 1950's *Caged*. "The minute I saw the film *Caged* it just blew me away. The film noir style combined with the exploitation element... When I started visualizing what Hell in a Handbag could do with it, I knew it would be my next project", says Cerda.

Caged Dames tells the gripping tale of an innocent young woman Mary Anderson, played by **Brigitte Ditmars*** (last seen as Lillian Hellman in *Judy's Scary Little Christmas*) who - through a series of unfortunate events - finds herself in the Calumet City Women Penitentiary at the mercy of the sadistic, oyster loving prison matron, Elsie Emerson (**Ed Jones*** Nonnie in *POSEIDON! An Upside Down Musical*), and her sniveling, love struck sidekick, Schnitzzy, (**Derek Czaplewski*** Bing Crosby in *Judy's Scary Little Christmas*).

Mary seeks solace with the seemingly sympathetic Warden Hope (**David Cerda***) but soon learns the gritty ins and outs of prison life thanks to Big Lorraine (**Tina Haglund***), the tough as nails 'Queen Bee' of the Calumet City Women's Penitentiary and the rest of the colorful denizens of Cellblock H, which include: **Michael Miller*** as Sally, the oldest gal in the cellblock and lifer, **Trista Smith** (Ethel Merman in *Judy's Scary Little Christmas*), as 'Trixie', the 'C.P.' (Common prostitute) with a heart of gold, **Trish Austin** as Betty, the average housewife with a recipe for death, **BC Kalz*** as 'Blondie', the delusional Hollywood has been who never was, **Hilary Sanzel**

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as the Frankie, the 'butch' dame, and '**Jane Doe**' as Typist/Guard, the woman who's worked in the prison so long she doesn't even have a name.

Hell in a Handbag newcomers, **Earliana McLaurin** as Earl Jean Washington, the woman with a song in her heart and chip on her shoulder, **Adrienne Smith** as Myrtle, who's sweet as pie, (a *murder pie!*), **Annie Gloyn** as 'Aggie', the prison snitch, and **Cheryl Snodgrass** as Bigger Lorraine, vice queen and Big Lorraine's arch-rival!

The production team includes **David Cerda**, co-producer, book, lyrics & music; **Scott Bradley** (Open Circle/Seattle), director; **Andra Velis Simon** (Open Eye), music direction; **Shawn Quinlan**, choreographer; **Heath Hayes**, set and lighting design; **Philip Dawkins**, costumes; **Annie Clapper** (Open Eye), music arrangement w/additional arrangement by **Jon Steinhagen**; and **Ed Jones**, co-producer.

*Indicates Hell in a Handbag Productions ensemble member

WRITER AND DIRECTOR BIOS

DAVID CERDA (Book, lyrics, music) is the Artistic Director and co-founder of Hell in a Handbag Productions. Previous Hell in a Handbag produced plays written by Cerda include *Come and Knock at My Door* and *Eyes for The Twilight Gallery*, *SCARRIE-The Musical*, *Rudolph-The Red-Hosed Reindeer*, *How 'Whatever Happened to Baby Jane' Happened*, and *POSEIDON! An Upside Down Musical* (International New York Fringe Festival/Outstanding Ensemble, Omaha Theatre Arts Guild Awards Nominee). As Co-Artistic Director with Sweetback Productions (1998-2001) plays include *The Birds* (LA Theatre Weekly Award Nominee), *Touched by Jayne Mansfield*, *Queen of the Round Up* (Music, lyrics), the Jacqueline Susann monologues from *Jacqueline Susann's Valley of the Dolls*, *Joan Crawford Goes to Hell*, *sCarrie! The Musical*, and *SUPERPUSSYVIXENS, Go Faster! Kill!*. Cerda has also performed with Corn Productions (*The Bad Seed-The Musical- JEFF Recommended*), the *Feast of Fools* stage show, The New Town Writer's and Live Bait Theater's *Fillet of Solo Festival(Debbie Harry Saved My Life)*.

SCOTT BRADLEY (Director) is a director, actor, producer, and instructor, whose work over the past seventeen years has been seen in New York, Washington DC, Seattle, and Bar Harbor, Maine. As a director, he has developed and premiered seven new works for the theatre, both musical and non-musical, in addition to numerous regional premieres and established plays. Before coming to Chicago, he served as Director of Arlington Dramatists Project, the new play development wing of Washington Shakespeare Company (DC), where he work-shopped Chicago native Jeff Goode's *ROMEO & JULIUS* as part of a nationally-recognized series of new works in development. He is a founder and former Artistic Director of Seattle's Open Circle Theater and served as Associate Artistic Director at Brooklyn's BACA Downtown.

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In Chicago, he was last seen in The Hypocrites' production of Tony Kushner's *ANGELS IN AMERICA*, in which he played Prior Walter.

Q & A WITH WRITER DAVID CERDA

1. What was your inspiration in writing *Caged Dames*?

Caged Dames was inspired by older black and white noir women in prison films from the 40's and 50's, particularly *Caged* starring Eleanor Parker from 1950. Believe it or not, I hadn't seen it (*Caged*) until this year. The minute I saw it just blew me away. The noir style combined with exploitation film disguised as a women's 'message' film. I just love it (*Caged*), and when I started visualizing what Hell in a Handbag could do with it, I knew it would be my next project.

2. Tell me a little bit about the *Caged Dames* creative team-

Well the challenge for any small not-for-profit theater company is finding extraordinary people to work with for next to nothing. You really have to hope that they're going to be as passionate about the work as you are or else why else would they do it? I consider Handbag extremely fortunate that we have people like Andra Velis Simon (Music Director), Heath Hayes (Set and Lighting Design), Shawn Quinlan (Choreographer) and Scott Bradley (Director) on board. They're all new to Handbag and it's invigorating to work with new people. Scott (Bradley) is relatively new to Chicago and when I met him his knowledge of everything from the style of theater we do to various film genres, to acting styles of actresses from the golden age of Hollywood just impressed the hell out of me. It was like meeting a long lost twin.

3. Why do you call your work a 'parodage'?

Parodage is a word I created that combines parody and homage, because 'parody' just didn't seem like a fair description of the work. Technically, yes, it is a parody, but (to me, at least) it's so much more than that. When I choose to pay my respects to a certain film or genre it's because I truly love it, and it's as much as a tribute to the all of the people, from the actors to the director that created the original work. Of course 'homage' sounds *too* serious. The goal is to make people laugh, but never *at* the subject. I really want to share with the rest of the world just how amazing these films are.

Q & A WITH DIRECTOR SCOTT BRADLEY

1. What attracted you to this particular project?

When I came to Chicago in January '05 and began investigating the incredible smorgasbord of theatres in the area, each with their very specific missions, my curiosity was peaked by this group called Hell in a Handbag Productions. I immediately envisioned a company dedicated to unabashedly camp comedy. What I didn't expect was writer David Cerda's emerging canon of new musicals. Both outrageous and whip-smart, his parodies of iconic films and film genres manage to still honor their chosen idols while sending them up in high style. With a passion for the development of new works, and a great love for and experience with the works of Charles Ludlam and Theatre of the Ridiculous, as well as Charles Busch and the British drag-clown troupe Blooplips, I knew I wanted to work with this company.

What I love about CAGED DAMES is how perfectly David creates the mood and rhythms of film noir, with its lightning-quick dialogue laced with urban jazz slang and its dark, sinister tone. Layered onto the film noir, he gives a knowing wink to the Roger Corman "jailbird" sexploitation movies that came later. And then there's his score, with fantastic pastiches of everything from 40s-era Broadway tunes and blues numbers to an Andrew Lloyd-Webber power ballad. And most importantly, with all the splash and comedy, it's still the tragic tale of innocence corrupted by an immoral society. Delicious!

2. What do you see as the challenges when directing a new work, particularly this story genre?

For any director taking a new theatrical work into its first staging, it's like parenting a child. The primary challenge is attempting to get the infant on its feet for the first time, and not just standing, but running at top speed for an arena of spectators. And like parenting, it is both a terrifying and thrilling challenge to undertake.

As for the genre, the greatest challenge is getting the tone right. Film noir is raw and seductive, exposing the darker side of human nature. In creating this parody of film noir, and with musical numbers no less, the hardest thing to accomplish is to bring the comedy up through the bleakness as opposed to laying it over the top. This is a fully realized story, not a comic sketch, and the only way to keep an audience engaged for the duration is to grow the comedy organically out of the genre being parodied.

3. What do you hope to give audience with this production of Caged Dames?

We must feel that we are inside that film noir world of dangerously predatory women, fallen angels, and wise-cracking broads. We must care for the characters and their stories even as we wet ourselves laughing. And we all leave humming a brand new tune!