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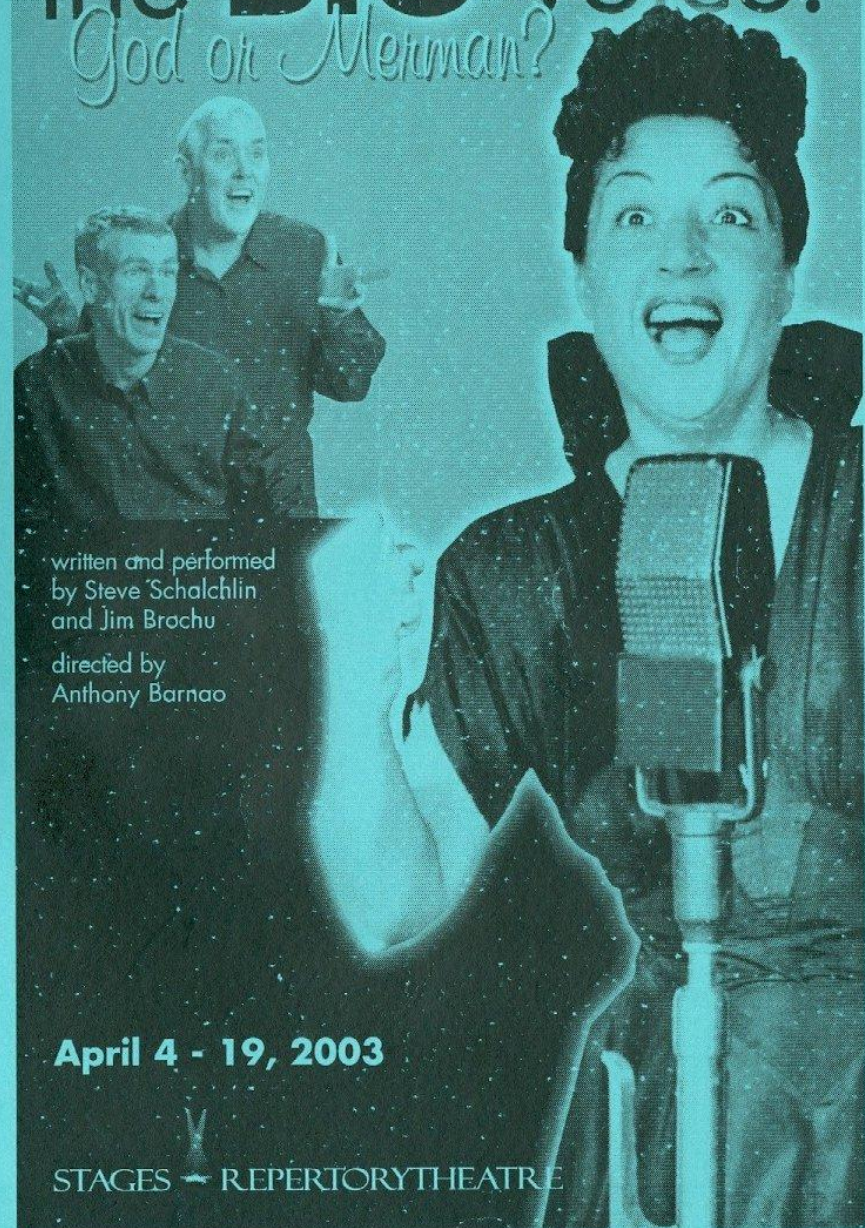
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the **BIG** voice:
God or Merman?



written and performed
by Steve Schalchlin
and Jim Brochu

directed by
Anthony Barnao

April 4 - 19, 2003

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Rob Bundy
Artistic Director

Kenn McLaughlin
Managing Director

**PFLAG-Houston and the PFLAG/HATCH
Youth Scholarship Foundation**

Present **the BIG voice:**
God or Merman?

By Steve Schalchlin and Jim Brochu

Directed by Anthony Barnao

April 4 - 19, 2003
Stages Arena Theater

Featuring

Steve Schalchlin
Jim Brochu

With Robert Mandan as "The Big Voice"

Lighting Design
David Gipson

Production Stage Manager
Karen Mata

Additional lyrics by
Bev Sykes and Marie Cain

The Big Voice: God or Merman? was originally produced by the Blue Sphere Alliance at the Lex Theatre, Anthony Barnao, Artistic Director.

This production has been generously underwritten by Nixon Wheat and the Elliott H. Matthews Foundation.

This project is funded in part by a grant from the Mayor's Initiative Program through the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.

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PFLAG-Houston

The mission of PFLAG Houston is to

Support Families - working to keep families in loving relationships by helping them understand and affirm their gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered family members.

Educate the Public - seeking to dispel the myths and misinformation by working with educators, community and religious groups, the media, and the general public.

Advocate for Equality - calling for equal human and civil rights. PFLAG provides opportunities for dialog about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is respectful of human diversity.

PFLAG/HATCH Youth Scholarship Foundation

The PFLAG/HATCH Youth Scholarship Foundation offers a college scholarship program to honor outstanding achievement by lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered high school seniors and university students. In July 2002, a total \$73,500 in scholarships was awarded.

In addition to supporting continuing education for deserving recipients, the Foundation provides role models and encouragement for the recipients' peers. Awards are based on interviews, school records and financial needs, with particular attention focused on the students' dis-enfranchisement and their struggles to come to terms with their sexual orientation. The Foundation acknowledges our GLBT youth by providing a community that supports them in their struggle to achieve self-respect and a strong positive self-worth with their sexual identity.

Applications may be obtained from school counselors, or by accessing www.pflaghouston.org and selecting the keyword, Scholarships. Terms and conditions are included in the scholarship application package. All applications will be kept strictly confidential. Application deadline is May 1, 2003.

Stages Repertory Theatre

Stages Repertory Theatre is dedicated to providing Houston's diverse audiences with challenging, provocative theatre produced with the highest artistic standards. From ground-breaking new works to modern classics, Stages brings the best of today's theatre home to Houston.

Born in the basement of a brewery in 1978, Stages was created as Houston's "maverick" theatre - a place where new ideas and new voices could be heard and appreciated. The response was overwhelming, and Stages quickly became an integral part of the Houston theater community. In 1985 Stages moved to its current two-theater facility in the historic Star Engraving Building on Allen Parkway, and this relocation paved the way for the introduction of EarlyStages, which is dedicated to producing intelligent, high-quality theatre for children and their families. Stages became Houston's second Equity theatre in 1988.

Rob Bundy was named Artistic Director in 1996, and under his guidance Stages has moved to the forefront of American theatre and achieved a new level of artistic quality and financial stability. Today Stages' MainStage season continues to push the limits of contemporary theatre, offering audiences a varied repertoire of world and regional premieres (*Elizabeth Rex*, *Ascendancy*, *Anton in Show Business*), innovative treatments of dramatic and literary classics (*Blood Wedding*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Shakespeare's R&J*), and pioneering, risk-taking productions (*The Laramie Project*, *Betty's Summer Vacation*, *The Pitchfork Disney*) that are not likely to be seen anywhere else in town. Each production is brought to life by an exceptional team of artists, performers and craftspeople almost exclusively from the Houston area.

With the same professional standards and spirit of adventure that characterize the MainStage season, EarlyStages introduces young children to the power and magic of live theatre. Over 40,000 local school children and families experience dramatic interpretations of classic folktales (*Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*), stories from diverse world cultures (*Sundiata: The Lion King*, *The Firebird*), and plays and musicals commissioned for EarlyStages (*The Courage of Mandy Kate Brown*). These productions stimulate both the intellect and the imagination and leave children with impressions that last a lifetime.

Stages continues to cultivate new plays and playwrights by sponsoring the Southwest Festival of New Plays, an annual festival featuring the best new plays from across the country submitted in four divisions: plays by women; plays reflecting Texas and the Southwest; plays by Latino writers; and plays for children. Winners of this competition have also been featured in the MainStage and EarlyStages seasons.

who's who

STEVE SCHALCHLIN (Writer, performer) was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, and raised in Buna, Texas, a hundred miles east of Houston. He is the son of a Baptist preacher and a nurse. He is proud to be the recipient of two Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Awards for Best Musical Score (for off-Broadway's **The Last Session** and **The Big Voice: God or Merman?**) and two PFLAG-LA Oscar Wilde Awards. **The Last Session** was also nominated for Best Musical by the New York Drama League and the New York Outer Critics Circle. Schalchlin is a lifelong musician who, after growing up in his daddy's church, stumbled into a theater in Dallas one day and got a job singing and dancing, something that went against his Baptist feet, but which gave him a passion for theatre. He is also an internet pioneer and diarist. His website, *Living In The Bonus Round* (bonusround.com), has been designated a "Landmark" by Yahoo/GeoCities. Featured in such publications as the NY Times, LA Times, People and on such television shows as "Extra!", he also performs in college concert solo tours and has performed for such schools as Harvard University, Stanford University, Penn State and many others.

JIM BROCHU (Writer, performer) On July 15, 2001, Jim Brochu's caricature was hung on the wall of Sardi's Restaurant in New York, a singular tribute to a thirty-year show business career as an actor, writer, director and producer. As playwright, he has written the comedies **The Lucky O'Learys** with Helen Hunt and Kathleen Freeman, **Fat Chance** with Virginia Capers, **The Lady Of The House** with Rue McClanahan, and the off-Broadway smash hit musical **The Last Session**, which he also directed. After **The Last Session's** New York run (for which he received Drama League and Outer Critics Circle nominations), the show was named by the Los Angeles

Times as one of the ten best plays of the 1998-1999 Los Angeles season, garnering him the Oscar Wilde Award and the GLAAD Media Award. Brochu won another Backstage West Award for his direction of the show, along with the Los Angeles Drama Critic's Circle Award as playwright. Jim chronicled his friend Lucille Ball's life as she told it to him over the backgammon table in his book, *Lucy In The Afternoon*, published by William Morrow and named as an alternate selection by The Literary Guild Book Club. He branched into directing with a production of *Can Can* starring Yvonne DeCarlo at the Tropicana Hotel in Atlantic City and has gone on to helm over 35 productions, working with John Travolta, Carol Channing, Donald O'Connor, Garry Marshall, Sid Caesar, Red Buttons, Jerry Lewis, Florence Henderson, Donny Osmond, Larry Hagman, Rip Taylor, Carol Lawrence, Betty Garrett, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Edie Adams, Fayard Nicolas, Penny Singleton, JoAnne Worley, Perry King and Robert Morse. He recently won his second Los Angeles Drama Critics Award with partner Steve Schalchlin for the score to their new musical, **The Big Voice: God or Merman?** Jim currently lives in Los Angeles where, between theatrical assignments, he travels all over the world lecturing about Broadway, Hollywood, and the stars with whom he has worked. He is an active member of the Dramatists Guild, Actors Equity Association, the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers and remains, as the New York Times called him, a true "Man Of The Theatre."

ANTHONY BARNAO (Director) Trained under Jose Quintero, Anthony has directed theater in New York and Los Angeles, including the world premieres of **Being of Sound Mind**, **The Last Chance Café**, **Clone**, **Peep Show** and **In the Bargain** (with Catherine Keener). As

Artistic Director of LA's Blue Sphere Alliance, he directed the world premieres of **The Big Voice** (LADCC Award Winner), **Fat Chance** (by Jim Brochu), **The Great Experiment?**, **Children of Shame**, **Home Sweet Hell** (LA Weekly Award Winner), **Souls In Flight**, **Fifth & Spring** and **Dance Upon Nothing**; the west coast premieres of **Nagasaki Dust**, Tennessee Williams' **Something Cloudy, Something Clear**, **Tissue**, **David and Lisa**, Neil Simon's **Fools**, an evening of Tennessee Williams' one acts entitled **Six By Tenn** and several one person shows: revivals of **Chamber Music**, **Indian Wants the Bronx** and the 30th anniversary production of **Lovers and Other Strangers**. Film directing credits include the feature **Annie's Garden** and the comedy short **The Home Branch**. He has also worked extensively as a casting director for film, television and theater, and cast the original workshop production of Brochu & Schalchlin's **The Last Session**.

DAVID GIPSON, USAA (Lighting Designer) Stages: **Dirty Blonde**; **The Drawer Boy**; **Communicating Doors**; **Romance, Romance**; **Elizabeth Rex**; **Betty's Summer Vacation**; **Runt of the Litter**; **Old Wicked Songs**; **The Turn of the Screw**; **Anton in Show Business**; **The Memory of Water**; **The Dying Gaul**; **Kindertransport**. EarlyStages: **Pinocchio 3.5**; **Alicia in Wonder Tierra**; **The House I Call Love**; **Noonie's Masterpiece in Purple**; **Tombigee**; **Sleeping Beauty**. Infernal Bridegroom Productions: **Soap Opera**; **Fucking A**. Unity Theater (Brenham): **Lettice and Lovage**; **The Glass Menagerie**. Off-Broadway: MCC Theater: **Runt of the Litter**. Chicago: Goodman Studio: **Straight as a Line**; **The State I'm In**. Steppenwolf Arts Exchange: **Our Town**; **The Boiler**

who's who

Room. Pegasus Players: **The State of Mississippi vs. Emmett Till**; **Shlemiel the First**; **The Lynching of Leo Frank** (nominated for Joseph Jefferson Citation); **Company** (nominated for Joseph Jefferson Citation). Education: University of Texas at Austin. Member of United Scenic Artists Local 829.

KAREN MATA (Production Stage Manager) As production stage manager: Stages: **Runt of the Litter**. EarlyStages: three seasons, including: **Pinocchio 3.5**; **Sunday Gold**; **The Toys Take Over Christmas**; **In Between**; **Alicia in Wonder Tierra**; **The Firebird**; **The House I Call Love**; **The Courage of Mandy Kate Brown**; **The Little Witch of Wichita**; **Cinderella**; **Noonie's Masterpiece in Purple**. TheaterLab: **Worth and Choice**. Unhinged Productions: **Blade to the Heat**. As assistant stage manager: Stages: **Blood Wedding**. Children's Theatre Festival: two seasons. Education: BA, Theatre, University of Houston.

ROB BUNDY (Artistic Director) is in his seventh season as Artistic Director of Stages where he has directed 22 productions, including **Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol**, **The Drawer Boy**, **Blood Wedding**, **The Laramie Project**, **Elizabeth Rex**, **Betty's Summer Vacation**, **Anton in Show Business**, **Shakespeare's R & J**, **Full Gallop**, **The Pitchfork Disney**, **Ascendancy**, and **Quills**. Mr. Bundy directed the New York premiere of **The Pitchfork Disney** at Blue Light Theatre Company as well as the New York premiere of **Ascendancy** at Rattlestick Theatre. Prior to coming to Stages, Mr. Bundy was a freelance director based in New York, where he worked at theaters such as the Pearl, the Lincoln Center Institute and Circle Repertory Lab. He also has directed at numerous regional theaters, including Actors Theatre of Louisville, Florida Studio Theatre

who's who

Meadowbrook Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, TheatreWorks, and the Chautauqua Institution. Mr. Bundy was the Associate Artistic Director at the Hartford Stage Company, 1992-1994. He has been a guest director at numerous training programs including the Juilliard School, Southern Methodist University and Shakespeare Theatre. Mr. Bundy is an on-site evaluator for the National Endowment for the Arts and has served on NEA/TCG grant panels.

KENN MCLAUGHLIN (Managing Director) Now in his second season at Stages, Mr. McLaughlin came to Stages following 11 years at Great Lakes Theater Festival in Cleveland, where he was a three-time nominee of the governor's award for excellence in the arts; a two-time winner of *Northern Ohio Live's* Award for community outreach; winner of the Ohio Historical Society's award for excellence in history education; and winner of arts educator of the year for Young Audiences of Greater Cleveland. A graduate of the Theater School, DePaul University, Mr. McLaughlin began his theater career working as an understudy in the world premieres of Horton Foote's **Dividing the Estate** and Adrienne Kennedy's **Ohio State Murders** starring Ruby Dee. He appeared professionally in productions of **Cyrano De Bergerac**, **A Christmas Carol**, **All My Sons** and **Angels in America**. Mr. McLaughlin's directorial credits include **American Buffalo**, **A Flea in Her Ear**, **The Normal Heart**, **Romeo and Juliet**, **Twelfth Night**, **Macbeth**, and the world premiere of Eric Coble's **Truth, the Testimonial of Sojourner Truth**. This past semester Mr. McLaughlin taught a course in creativity at Rice University.

Production Credits

Production Stage Manager
Karen Mata

Sound Board Operator
Mischa Hutchings

Light Board Operator
Kellie Silva-Noah

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Peg and George Nevers

Sue Null

Nucleus Design

Ann Marie Sanders

Gary Teixeira

Nixon Wheat

The Big Voice: God or Merman? is performed with one ten-minute intermission. Any use of cameras or other recording devices is strictly prohibited. Please turn off all cell phones, pagers and other electronic devices as a courtesy to the other patrons and to the actors.



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STAGES REPERTORY THEATRE

STAGES REPERTORY THEATRE IS A constituent of Theatre Communications Group, a national service organization for not-for-profit theatres. Seasonal operating expenses are partially supported by grants from the Texas Commission on the Arts and from the City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County. The theatre operates under an agreement with Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

Actors' Equity Association was founded in 1913 to protect actors from the severe mistreatment that permeated the industry at that time. Equity has had only twelve presidents. The current president is Patrick Quinn. The 39,000 member association consists of distinguished stars and other professional actors and stage managers who work nationwide, from New York's Broadway to Los Angeles, from Minneapolis to Miami Beach, in regional, stock, and dinner theatre, and in theatres for young audiences which build the audiences of tomorrow. These actors and stage managers are committed to working in the theatre as a profession, not an avocation, and bring to you the finest professional training and experience. By presenting Equity productions, this theatre offers you, our audience, the best entertainment presented by the finest quality actors and stage managers that your admission dollars can buy.

ssdc The Director is a member of the Equity of Stage Directors and Choreographers, Inc., an independent national labor union.



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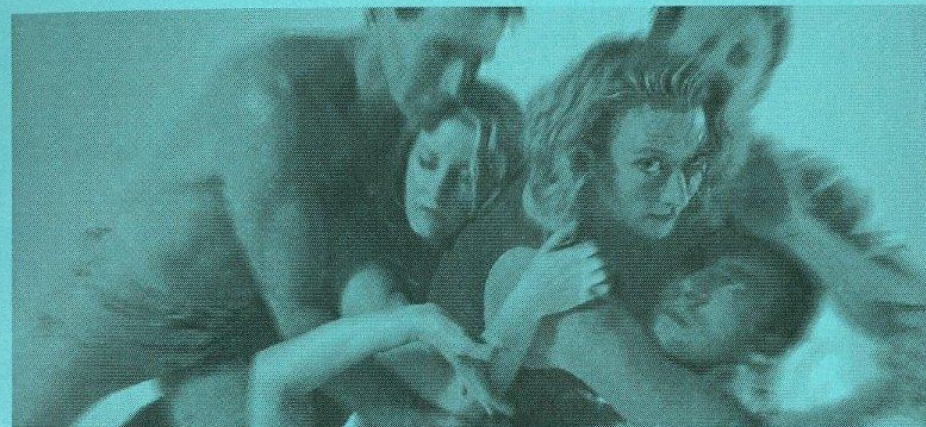
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THEATER REVIEW

A sincere 'Voice' speaks up at Stages

By **EVERETT EVANS**
Houston Chronicle

The Big Voice: God or Merman? is simplicity itself.

The two-man, autobiographical musical at Stages Repertory Theatre consists of just writers/performers Steve Schalchlin and Jim Brochu, their stories and songs, a keyboard and stool, a table and chair.

Yet, this little show is one of those cases in which minimalism works. The stories and songs come from the heart — and reach the heart, too.

Essentially, *The Big Voice* tells how two gay men from different backgrounds find each other.

It's also about how Brochu, a Brooklyn-born Catholic, and Schalchlin, a Southern Baptist raised in Arkansas and Texas, begin searching for meaning in their respective religions — but wind up finding spiritual solace in theater and in their relationship with each other.

Schalchlin and Brochu, who wrote the acclaimed off-Broadway musical *The Last Session*, premiered *Big Voice* to good reviews last year in Los Angeles. An off-Broadway production is planned for next season.

The first act tells how the two grew up, each struggling with being different. Brochu humorously recounts his childhood wish to become "the first Brooklyn-born Pope."

His real calling is revealed when he hears the cast album of *Annie Get Your Gun*, with Ethel Merman. Imagine Brochu's delight when his father reveals that he knows the legendary Broadway star (through a business connection with her father). Thus, the 13-year-old Brochu is taken to the Broadway Theater to see Merman in *Gypsy*, and what's more, gets to meet her onstage after the show.

It's the first of several encounters with Merman, whose persona becomes Brochu's spiritual touchstone.

Meanwhile, Schalchlin is struggling through adolescence and college. For a time, he plays with



D. Fahleson / Chronicle

Jim Brochu, left, and Steve Schalchlin, in front of a keyboard, ham it up with their songs and stories in *The Big Voice: God or Merman?* at Stages Repertory Theatre.

a Baptist rock band but that doesn't work out. Unable to tell family and friends the truth about himself, he tries to escape the world of his youth.

Many ups and downs later, the two meet — Brochu, a passenger on a cruise ship; Schalchlin, the ship's lounge pianist. They hit it off and sail into the sunset — to a shared life in Brochu's New York apartment.

The second act opens with some of the show's funniest moments as the two discover one another's foibles and idiosyncrasies.

Things turn dark as Schalchlin battles AIDS, which nearly kills him. At Brochu's urging, Schalchlin starts writing songs about his ordeal as therapy. The songs become the basis for *The Last Session*. Just as the show takes off and its success changes their lives, new medications put Schalchlin on the road back to health. There's an 11th-hour crisis to

threaten the couple's relationship, but realizing they are miserable without each other, they quickly get back together.

Though *Big Voice* at times covers familiar ground, it does so with warmth, humor and an often original perspective. Though it's handled lightly, there's good sense in the show's message that religion is not the only place to look for spiritual fulfillment.

Schalchlin carries a slightly larger share of the singing, performing with a clenched-fist intensity and earnestness. His plaintive music sometimes shows the influence of folkish, soft-pop songwriters such as James Taylor and Carole King. A few of his songs may even qualify as non-sectarian hymns. He certainly conveys a questing air.

Brochu gets a slightly bigger share of the storytelling — fine, since he's a natural raconteur. He assumes the more traditionally

"gay" persona that counts Paul Lynde and Liberace as patron saints — flamboyant, theatrical, unabashedly hammy, with a dash of smug-cat sarcasm. Recalling one of his TV-commercial acting jobs as a dancing raisin ("I was the gay raisin"), he makes the bit a comic highlight.

The Big Voice speaks in its own voice, authentic and sincere. That's the main reason this little show carries a big punch.

The Big Voice: God or Merman?
When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Thursdays and Sundays, 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, through April 19. Also, 4 p.m. April 19.

Where: Stages Repertory Theatre, 3201 Allen Parkway

Tickets: \$30; 713-527-0123; a portion of proceeds goes to PFLAG-Houston and the PFLAG/HATCH Youth Scholarship Foundation.