

Multimillion-dollar musical planned for Olympia

SHERAZADE COULD MOVE ON TO VEGAS Productions Revel and Gillett produce show

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GAZETTE THEATRE CRITIC

Sherazade, a new multimillion-dollar musical based on the heroine of *The Thousand and One Nights*, opens in Montreal in March at the Olympia Theatre.

Producer Patrick Levy, of Les Productions Revel, who is working with Groupe Spectacles Gillett to produce the show, said the 1,300-seat Olympia was on its way to being razed and replaced by condos. Then his friend Felix Gray, whose musical *Don Juan* became an international hit, proposed creating a musical for its stage.

Levy, 39, bought the idea and struck a deal with Gillett, a company with solid experience in all facets of the musical business.

The cast and creative team of *Sherazade* were presented yesterday at a press conference, complete with lavish Arabian nights decor and gourmet couscous, held at a restaurant in the Bell Centre.

Yves Desgagnés will be the stage director and Guy St-Onge the musical director.

Sherazade's production budget will be \$4 million to \$5 million, Levy said. As well, about \$3 million worth of renovation will be done to the theatre, which his company now owns. "The moment you enter the theatre for this show," he said, "you'll be entering into a dream."

The idea is to have the musical, about a wily young woman who saved herself from execution by spinning mesmerizing tales, in

residence at the Olympia for a long Montreal run. After that, it might head for Las Vegas – or Dubai.

How long a run? Until Sept. 14, 2009, Levy replied. But they're keeping the Olympia clear of other bookings until the end of 2009.

The title role of *Sherazade* will alternate between Rita Tabbakh and Audrey de Montigny. Philippe Berghella will play her potentially homicidal husband, Soliman the sultan. Other performers include Cassiopé, as Djinnia the witch, and Dominique Hudson of Quebec City as Aladin.

An English-language version of *Sherazade* is already on the way, Levy said. It's in the hands of pop singer Corey Hart.

While Levy and his partner in Productions Revel, Daniel Revah, are new to the musical theatre game, they're active in the pop music business, handling such acts as Lara Fabian, Antho-

ny Kavanagh and rhythm and blues group War, which plays the Olympia next week.

Director Desgagnés said he's also new to the world of commercial musicals. At the moment he's directing a production of Harold Pinter's *Le retour* (*The Homecoming*) at Théâtre du Nouveau Monde.

There will be plenty of drama to *Sherazade*, he said, but no dialogue. It's a sung-through musical.

"It will have an oriental flavour and North American energy," he added.

Sherazade, a musical by Félix Gray, will open at the Olympia Theatre on or about March 4, 2009. Tickets go on sale next week (Sept. 13). For information, call 514-790-1245 or 800-361-4595, or log on to: www.olympiademontreal.com

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ALLEN MUNNIS THE GAZETTE

Philippe Berghella (the sultan) hugs Rita Tabbakh (*Sherazade*) at a presentation yesterday of the cast of the musical *Sherazade*.