

# THE 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CHICAGO SKETCHFEST

THE NATION'S LARGEST SKETCH COMEDY FESTIVAL  
JANUARY 5<sup>TH</sup> - 15<sup>TH</sup> 2006

- \* 95 GROUPS FROM COAST TO COAST
- \* OVER 120 PERFORMANCES IN 8 DAYS
- \* MORE THAN 800 FUNNY PEOPLE ON 3 STAGES

Theatre Building Chicago, 1225 W. Belmont Avenue



## Tickets: 773-327-5252 or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)

Single Tickets - \$12.00

All Festival Pass - \$100.00 (Good for all shows)

Thursday One-Night Pass - \$20.00 • Friday One-Night Pass - \$40.00

OFF-OFF  
CAMERAS

# The Business

thebusiness@chicagoreader.com

## Dogfight

Two musicals about homeless pooches—how'd that happen?

By Tony Adler

Three months ago I wrote a story for one of the daily newspapers about *Bark!*, a musical that opened October 21 and is still playing at the Chicago Center for the Performing Arts. Composed by David Troy Francis with a book by Gavin Geoffrey Dillard (who also wrote the Great Dane's share of the lyrics), *Bark!* focuses on the small pleasures and major anxieties of six dogs stuck in an animal shelter. There's a prima donna purebred, a scruffy street mutt, a couple of old veteran working dogs, a kindly maternal bitch, and Rocks, the abandoned puppy everybody would call "Kid" if this were a war movie. They laugh, they cry, they howl, and they long to be adopted. The poodle sings an aria and Rocks whizzes on stuff. It's an eccentric but sweet—even occasionally soulful—show.

On October 27, six days after my story appeared, I received an e-mail from somebody named Mark Masi. "I am the librettist/lyricist for a musical called *DogMusic*," the e-mail begins. "It is the story of five dogs in the pound trying to get adopted . . ."

"If *DogMusic* sounds a lot like *BARK* . . ."

The e-mail goes on to claim that resemblances between the two shows aren't coincidental, and singles out *Bark!* director and choreographer Kay Cole as the alleged conduit through which features of *DogMusic*—first produced as a one-act in 1998—found their way into the Francis/Dillard musical, which premiered in Los Angeles in 2004. Phrases like "artistic rape" and "theft of an idea" are used alongside words like "maddening" and "heartbreaking."

"Absolutely outrageous," replies Francis. "[*Bark!*] is my show."

A pianist with special expertise in performing the work of contemporary American composers like Ned Rorem, Francis has a Scooby-Doo-ish air of enthusiasm and a fondness for wishing people "much joy." He says the idea for *Bark!*, his first staged musical, came to him while writing music for a short mockumentary called *Dogs*, about actors who play canines in "the longest-running off-off-off-off-Broadway show in history." He claims he'd never heard of *DogMusic* until late last summer,



Clockwise from top: Jess Platt and Mark Masi (front) with the cast of *DogMusic* circa 1998; the cast of *Bark!*, now at the Chicago Center for the Performing Arts; David Troy Francis

when he saw a trade notice saying the show would receive a workshop production in New York, October 20-22—as it happens, the same weekend *Bark!* opened here.

Francis wonders why he "never heard a word from these [*DogMusic*] guys" during three years of *Bark!* workshops or the first year of its LA run. And he argues that Cole's influence on the script was necessarily minimal because she came on board only "about eight weeks before we opened in LA"—replacing the original director, Robert Schrock, when "the show was very close to complete."

But nobody denies Cole had some kind of professional interaction with

brought elements of *DogMusic* with her to *Bark!*, Francis says she argued for retaining the doggie-day-care concept while he held out for the change to the animal shelter.

Cole originated the role of Maggie in *A Chorus Line* 30 years ago, and now works offstage as a director and choreographer for theater, film, and TV. While protesting repeatedly that her dealings with *DogMusic* were too "minimal" to remember clearly, she says she and Masi "met a couple of times and we did a couple of e-mails, and I gave absolutely no creative input, and quite honestly I felt the relationship was rather insignificant." Did she and Masi discuss the script and casting

***Bark!* composer David Troy Francis claims he'd never heard of *DogMusic* until late last summer.**

the *DogMusic* authors before she went to work on *Bark!* That interaction is crucial to Masi and composer Jess Platt's case because of certain revisions that were written into *Bark!* in the months between its LA and Chicago openings—which is to say, during Cole's tenure as director. The pre-Cole *Bark!* is essentially a plotless revue set in a doggie-day-care center; after her arrival the setting was switched to an animal shelter, and the book was expanded. The issue then is how much Cole knew about *DogMusic*, and what—if anything—she shared with Francis and company.

Masi states that in 2002 Cole "was aggressive in trying to connect herself" to what turned out to be an abortive LA production of *DogMusic*. She "sat down with me (and others)," he writes, "to discuss both script and casting in great detail." Platt adds that she was "heavily involved. Mark had serious meetings with her regarding casting, character development, and plot lines."

Francis says he was unaware of Cole's connection with *DogMusic* until he saw the notice about the workshop in New York. Struck by the similarity of that project to his own, he mentioned the notice to Cole, who then "told me she had been involved on a very minor basis for a very short time." By way of debunking the notion that Cole

in "great detail"? "No, that's not true," she says—though "I did make a casting wish list with people like Elaine Stritch and Matthew Broderick: a wild wish list." She told me she was asked to direct, said yes, "and then there was very little connection after that," because Masi and Platt changed their plans and decided to launch the production in New York.

Masi sent me the *DogMusic* script, along with a CD consisting of six songs he wrote with Platt. (Francis refused to send the *Bark!* text for comparison, saying he didn't want it evaluated by anyone other than a judge.) Like *Bark!* it's got its show dog, its working dog, and its cute little pup a la Rocks. But it pushes its social agenda much more intensely than *Bark!* does, attacking dogfights, dog shows, dog abuse, dog breeding practices, and even rotten little kids who beg for dogs from their indolent, irresponsible parents. By contrast, *Bark!* focuses more on the internal lives of its characters.

It's strange to watch these hyper-compassionate artists squabble over shows intended to sensitize us to the sufferings of our canine friends. But then homeless dogs are helpless—Francis, Masi, Cole, and Platt have lawyers, and they're referring the matter to them. ☐

Deanna Isaacs is on vacation.

**Brew & View**

**Movies, TV & more...**  
18 to enter 21 to drink  
Photo ID required

www.BrewView.com 3145 N. Sheffield at Belmont

7:00pm (Sun), 8:00pm (Fri, Sat, Mon-Thr)

**The 40 Year Old Virgin**

\$5.00 admission for the Movies

9:00pm (Sun), 10:00pm (Fri, Sat, Mon-Thr)

**Miller Wedding Crashers**  
Good call.

Everyone must be 18+ and have a VALID state issued photo ID to enter

Turquoise

Contemporary Turkish Cuisine  
Sunday Brunch 9-3pm

2147 W. ROSCOE ST.  
773-549-3523

**CARRY OUT OR DELIVERY  
FREE APPETIZER  
WITH \$20 ORDER**  
CARRY OUT OR DELIVERY ONLY.  
ANY APPETIZER.  
Must present coupon.  
Not valid with any other offer.  
Expires 01-31-06

**SPECIAL DEAL  
1/2 PRICE!**  
BUY 1 ENTREE  
AND GET 2ND ONE  
1/2 PRICE!  
Must present coupon.  
Not valid with any other offer.  
Expires 01-31-06

**NOW AVAILABLE  
GIFT CERTIFICATES**  
PAY \$40 AND RECEIVE A  
\$50 CERTIFICATE!  
PAY \$80 AND RECEIVE A  
\$100 CERTIFICATE!

Join us in celebrating our  
**5 Year Anniversary!**

**costello sandwich & sides**

**WE LOVE YOU CHICAGO!**  
Thank you for five great years!

**Visit us in January for:**  
Daily Festivities..

- T-Shirt giveaways & balloons for the kids
- 300 prizes per day
- Register to win free lunches & catering for your office

**Now Offering lunchtime delivery!**

**In Lincoln Square at  
4647 N. Lincoln (773)989-7788**

www.costellosandwich.com  
ЯЯЯ - Reader Restaurant Raters