

# Director's 'Spider Woman' wish finally comes true

BY DAVID BURKE  
*Eagle correspondent*

It took three decades, but Rick Bumgardner is finally getting his chance to stage the musical "Kiss of the Spider Woman."

"I saw it on Broadway in 1993 and decided then," said Bumgardner, artistic director of Roxy's Downtown. "I would be doing this show one day."

It was on Roxy's schedule for October 2020, but was bumped due to COVID until it eventually found a spot beginning next weekend.

Bumgardner said the musical,

which won seven Tony Awards (including the trifecta of best musical, book and score) immediately made an impression on him.

"I was overwhelmed when I walked out of that theater and I didn't know how I felt or what had happened to me other than incredible musical theater," he recalled. "The subject matter is one that is exploring the human condition of two disparate men inside a prison and how they cope. That was intriguing to me as to how that could possibly have caused a spontaneous standing ovation. No one in the audience had a dry eye."

Broadway's "Spider Woman"

won acting awards for Brent Carver, Anthony Crivello and Chita Rivera.

"They were just amazing," Bumgardner said.

In the respective roles are Shaun-Michael Morse as Molina, a gay window dresser doing time in an Argentine prison; Zeke Thompson as Valentin, a revolutionary who is new to the jail cell; and Claire Gerig as Aurora, a fantasy spider woman, who kills with her kiss.

Morse was familiar with the title song, which he sang in a revue, although it's meant for the female title character.

"It's like this big, big song, which I loved to sing because it



Courtesy photo

"Kiss of the Spider Woman" will be performed May 18 to June 3 at Roxy's Downtown.

utilized my whole range,” he said. “I have this deep admiration and love for Terrence McNally, who wrote the book of this show.

This is my third McNally, because I directed ‘Corpus Christi’

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# SPIDER WOMAN

and we did ‘Love! Valour! Compassion!’ at Roxy’s, which I was in. I just love the themes he picks for his work, similar to the things he wrote about in ‘Love! Valour!’”

While a musical theater student at Wichita State,

Gerig studied “Spider Woman” and was impressed by everything around it.

“Getting to do it in a way that’s uniquely ours is really so refreshing and so fascinating,” she said. “You don’t have the pres-

sure to create a carbon copy of someone else’s art, and we get to interpret in our own way while still being true to the message of the show, which is important and special.”

Thompson said he’s amazed at the arc his character takes.

“We’re really exploring the characters and their own human condition and what they go through,” he

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said. “I think it’s interesting how Valentin especially, whenever you see him on stage, he’s different. He’s gone through some sort of change. It’s interesting to see such a fast change during a show of a character from start to finish.”

Bumgardner said “Spider Woman” on Roxy’s stage is in a different climate than when he saw it on Broadway.

“Thirty years later, the message of the story is even more relevant in today’s times than it was in 1993,” he said. “And it’s a lot easier to talk about some of the things that the musical talks about because we’ve come a long way. They were breaking barriers at that time and today with this musical I think we’re knocking them back down

to people who are trying to raise the walls back up.”

## **‘KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN’**

**When:** May 18 to June 3; performances at 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays and 2 p.m. Saturdays

**Where:** Roxy’s Downtown, 412 ½ E. Douglas

**Tickets:** \$36.35, from [roxysdowntown.com](http://roxysdowntown.com) or 265-4400

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