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# Roxy's brings story of gay friendship to stage with 'Love! Valour! Compassion!'

BY DAVID BURKE  
Eagle correspondent

As a Northeast Magnet High School student 17 years ago, Viviano Legorreta read a play that changed his life.

It was Terrence McNally's Tony Award-winning script, "Love! Valour! Compassion!," about a group of eight gay men who spent their holidays together, baring their souls — and in some cases, their bodies — as they celebrate their strengths and admit their weaknesses.

"Even then I knew how big it was, but I knew it was about me," Legorreta recalled. "I always told myself that if the time was right and the opportunity presented itself, I would audition for it."

Fast-forward to 2019 and the Wichita stage veteran auditions for a role in "Love! Valour! Compassion!," his first role at Roxy's Downtown in Wichita.

"It's a culmination of everything I've done up until this point," Legorreta said. "To finally realize the dream you had when you were a kid makes it all worth it."

Roxy's is staging "Love!" for the entire month of June, opening Saturday night.

Rick Bumgardner, Roxy's artistic director and the director of "Love!," said he wanted to produce an LGBTQ-themed show to mark the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, violent protests by



Courtesy photo

"Love! Valour! Compassion!" runs June 1-30 at Roxy's Downtown.

gay men in the Greenwich Village section of New York, as well as the continuing fight in the community against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Bumgardner remembers seeing the show on Broadway in 1995, not long after it opened.

"I remember being astounded on stage," he said. "Everyone was laughing and accepting the show, Terrence McNally's incredible writing of these fierce characters and their need to matter."

"It was resonating with 1,000 people in the Walter Kerr Theatre."

"Love! Valour! Compassion!" opened with a cast including Nathan Lane, Anthony Heald and John Glover, the latter of whom won a Tony Award for featured actor.

Bumgardner quoted McNally as saying it was the first play about gay men that showed what they were when their straight friends weren't around.

a way that I have never had to engage before. It's also one of the most stimulating, exciting things I've ever done."

Another challenging role is Bobby, a blind legal assistant, played by Seth Knowles.

"It's been one of the most unique roles I've done," said Knowles, one of three straight actors in the production.

Although instructions for the play list it as being in "present day," Bumgardner is setting the show in the mid-1990s, when it debuted on stage.

"The startling thing we all found as a group is just how timely the script still seems," Legorreta said. "A lot of things have changed since then, but what's more startling is what hasn't changed. It's been fun uncovering that."

"It's been like a time capsule in a way," Morse said. "But I believe that time is circular and cyclical, and what goes around comes around."

Roxy's is rating the production R, for its language and male nudity. Four organizations — Positive Directions, Equality Kansas, Club Boomerang, Miss Gay US of A pageants — will receive a portion of the ticket prices, and information from HIV/AIDS organizations will be available at the theater.

"I want the community to come and see it and remember what it is to celebrate. Even when there's a cloud hanging over it in our political climate, celebrate who it is that we were," Legorreta said. "It's great to remember the families that you create around you and those that go with you. It celebrates friendship in every facet you can possibly imagine."

## 'Love! Valour! Compassion!'

**When:** June 1-30, 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m. Sundays, June 2, 16 and 30; 6 p.m. Sundays, June 9 and 23

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

**Tickets:** \$20-\$30, by calling the box office at 316-265-4400

"It was the first LGBT play to be on Broadway that was entirely centered around that, and the characters weren't self-deprecating characters," Bumgardner said.

Glover played John and James Jekyll, identical twins. At Roxy's, those roles are played by Shaun-Michael Morse.

"I think this is one of the most magnificent pieces of writing ever," Morse said. "I have to really engage in