

'Streets of Gold' to return to State Theatre for the Arts

BY FRANCES BORSODI ZAJAC

Herald-Standard Staff Writer

"Streets of Gold," the musical drama about early 20th century immigrants to southwestern Pennsylvania's coal fields, will return to the State Theatre Center for the Arts in Uniontown this October.

Billed as the opening show for the State Theatre's 2000-2001 season, "Streets of Gold" will play for three weeks in what's hoping to become a tourist attraction to draw people into the area from as far away as Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

In fact, officials are looking at "Streets of Gold" as a long-term project in which it may become a permanent summer show for the State Theatre. The idea is to pull tourists

in to see the musical and then keep them overnight to see other area attractions.

"We're going to give it a try and see how it goes," said Robert Eberly, spokesman for the Eberly Foundation, which is sponsoring the show. "It's a good story to tell."

"Streets of Gold" follows three generations of the Italian DeTrenta family during the 1920s as they seek to make a better life for themselves and their children's children in the southwestern Pennsylvania coal fields.

Originally commissioned in 1992 by Fayette County Commissioner Fred Lebder and Eberly, president of Greystone Productions, "Streets

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Ron Iannone, left, producer of West Virginia Public Theatre, talks about the return of "Streets of Gold" to the State Theatre Center for the Arts Wednesday in a press conference at the Fayette County Courthouse. Also at the conference were (seated from left) Uniontown Mayor James Sileo, Chris Wagner, executive director for the State Theatre Center for the Arts, and Tom Detitta, writer of the production.

DALE LOCKMAN
Herald-Standard



Mapping plans for the historical drama that will be presented at the State Theatre are (left to right) playwright Tom DeTitta, Robert Eberly, Ron Iannone and Rick Frank.

(Herald-Standard Photo by Joe Schiffbauer)

Historical drama scheduled at State Theatre

By KRIS SCHIFFBAUER
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Immigrants who came to America around the turn of the century made a similar discovery that Christopher Columbus made 500 years ago.

A North Carolina playwright will finish an historical drama on the theme of discovering America in time for the quincentennial anniversary of Columbus Day.

The Eberly Family Foundation, Lakeview Theater of Morgantown, W.Va., and the State Theatre Center for the Arts will bring the drama to Uniontown this fall.

The original work chronicles the lives of an Italian immigrant family as it settles in the Uniontown area and tries to fit into American culture. Unionization of the mining industry and the effect on this family is another theme running throughout the play. The action is

loosely structured and takes place around the turn of the century and into present day.

The commissioned play will open at the State Theatre Center for the Arts in Uniontown on Oct. 10 and run through Oct. 17.

Lakeview Theater will produce the play by Tom DeTitta.

Robert Eberly said the play may be presented at Great Meadows Amphitheater in 1983. He noted the historical drama "Young Washington" failed twice at the amphitheater, but he is optimistic about the success of DeTitta's work.

Eberly explained the project began last February with a letter to Fayette County commissioner Fred Lebder from DeTitta.

DeTitta was successful in writing and producing "The Reach of Song" in Georgia, which was adopted as the official play of the state. He also contributed to the building of an amphitheater. A Duke University graduate,

DeTitta is a published author, as well as producer and playwright.

"We talked about the ethnic resources in our area and told Tom about the number of people from Italy," said Eberly.

He added DeTitta was encouraged to write about the area's ethnic experience, not necessarily of the Italians, but all who came here and worked in the mines.

DeTitta made four trips to the area to research the subject. He interviewed many local people about their experiences.

He also traveled to New York and Eastern Europe to visit locations significant to the immigrants.

"Everyone in the area, if not directly involved in the coal story, had a relative who was. Everybody had something to do with the immigrant story," said DeTitta.

"What went on here during the coal boom, (See HISTORICAL on Page B-3)

Historical drama scheduled

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I think is of tremendous importance."

He said immigrants at one time were not proud of their ethnic background but have renewed interest in the past comparable to the history of New York's Ellis Island, where many immigrants first entered America.

Ellis Island was in disrepair and left to deteriorate for many years until it was converted recently into a museum.

Discovery is the idea behind the play.

DeTitta said the act of coming to the New World as an immigrant in the turn of the century is significant to the celebration of Columbus Day.

"Imagine one of us breaking all the ties we have and going thousands of miles away to start a new life," said Eberly.

Ron Iannone of Lakeview Theater announced that try-outs will be held in April and five weeks of rehearsal will begin Sept. 4. The production will incorporate local people as dancers as well as minor and major actors.

"Not many areas have the opportunity to watch a musical being developed," said Iannone. "It is an exceptional opportunity for young people to watch a play being born."

He added students and teachers will have the opportunity to follow the progress of the play which is now being drafted.

Music and lyrics will be the original compositions of Frank Lewin, professor of music at Yale University. Lewin's accomplishments include theater music, operas, concert compositions, film, television and historical drama.

The State Theatre Center for the Arts will assist Lakeview Theater with ticket sales and technical support and make available rehearsal and performance space.

Rick Frank, president of the State Theatre board, said the theater has received a great deal of support from the community and is compelled as an organization to give something back.

"We don't have a lot of historical dramas to offer. This is one we would like to be able to present and contribute to," said Frank. "We are exalted about the opportunity and appreciate the opportunity to be a form for this project."

Tickets will go on sale the first week of April.