



## **THE FIRST WIVES CLUB**



## **PRESS HIGHLIGHTS**





# REVIEWS



# SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

August 3, 2009

## THEATER REVIEW

# 'First Wives' is a 2nd-act dazzler

### DETAILS

#### **"The First Wives Club"**

Old Globe Theatre

**When:** Tuesdays-  
Wednesdays, 7 p.m.;  
Thursdays-Fridays, 8  
p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8  
p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7  
p.m. Through Aug. 30.

**Where:** 1363 Old Globe  
Way, Balboa Park

**Tickets:** \$66-\$92

**Phone:** (619) 234-5623

**Online:** TheOldGlobe.org

It takes off when  
the music kicks in

**By James Hebert**  
THEATER CRITIC

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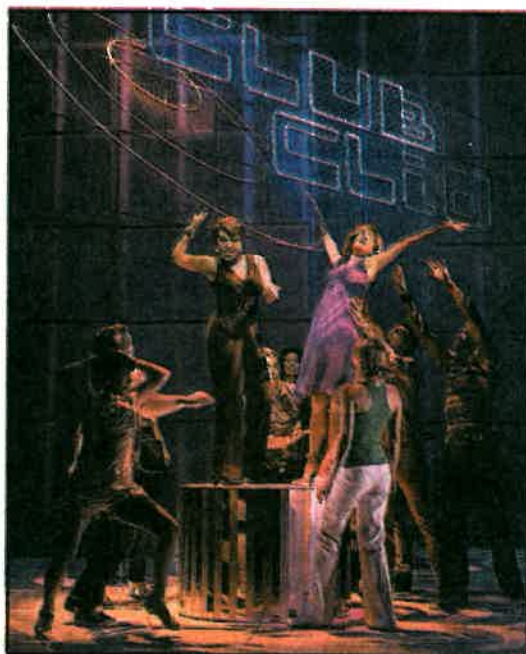
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But that first half, when we meet the wives and their woes, is just a setup for the second, when they actually go into action. That's when "First Wives" and its new songs by the incomparable Motown team Holland/Dozier/Holland step up with a pizzazz that befits a (potentially) Broadway-bound show.

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**SEE Old Globe, E3**



Sheryl Lee Ralph (left) shares the pedestal with Karen Ziemba in "The First Wives Club," playing through Aug. 30 at The Old Globe Theatre.

Craig Schwartz



## ► OLD GLOBE

CONTINUED FROM E1

### Orchestra brings out music's verve

with a tough comeuppance, grossed \$181 million worldwide after its 1996 release.

The musical doesn't really deviate from the movie's story line in any major regard. But the show's writer, Rupert Holmes ("Curtains," "The Mystery of Edwin Drood"), finds ways to extract more laughs from the setup and craft distinct characters for the three leads: Barbara Walsh as the no-nonsense Jewish mom Brenda, Karen Ziemba as the terminally timid Annie and Sheryl Lee Ralph as the diva-tastic R&B singer Elyse.

Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland (HDH in popular shorthand) created some of the biggest hits of the '60s, from the Four Tops' "The Same Old Song" to the Supremes' "Where Did Our Love Go." Their signature sound, with its insistent rhythms and simple but powerful melodies, shines through in tunes such as the second-act opener "Jump for Joy" and the earlier "A Man Like Me."

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Left to right: Karen Ziemba, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Barbara Walsh star in "The First Wives Club." *Craig Schwartz*

credits (Broadway's "The Little Mermaid" among them). Still, the show could use a good trim — particularly in the first act, where the peppy "Ready for a Change" might make a stronger closer than the drawn-out segment that follows.

Walsh, Ziemba and Ralph have a solid feel for their characters and their voices match well on the songs, although on opening night Ralph sounded strained on her solo "That Was Me Then, This Is Me Now."

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The women try gamely to say the conspiracy against those three is not about revenge, but really, it is. And should be. The guys are jerks. In fact, the show's only sympathetic males are Brenda's young son Jason (played on opening night by rising local kid Austyn Myers, who alternates with Ari Lerner), and the apparently gay decorator Duane (Sam Harris, a total riot).

As strong as the main cast is, Harris, who takes on the outrageously funny persona of a snooty Italian designer named Duarto, and Sara Chase, who plays all three of the straying husband's young trophies, are absolute gifts to this show. Chase is all over the place, especially hilarious in the guys' cute and comical seduction number "I'm So Lucky." This show ought to get hitched permanently with her.

The orchestra, under music director Ron Melrose ("Jersey Boys") and with arrangements by the peerless Harold Wheeler, brings out all the verve of HDH's work. Peter J. Davison's vivid sets play with colors as confections (backed by Mark McCullough's versatile lighting), and Paul Tazewell's costumes have an inventive zip (especially Duarto's groovy suits).

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**James Hebert:** (619) 293-2040; [jim.hebert@uniontrib.com](mailto:jim.hebert@uniontrib.com); blog, [houseseats.uniontrib.com](http://houseseats.uniontrib.com); Twitter, [jimhebert](https://twitter.com/jimhebert)

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August 3, 2009

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## THEATER REVIEW

## 'First Wives' is a 2nd-act dazzler

It takes off when the music kicks in

By **James Hebert**

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

2:00 a.m. August 3, 2009

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Annie (Karen Ziemba, left), Brenda (Barbara Walsh) and Elyse (Sheryl Lee Ralph) work to keep their friendships together after their marriages melt down in "The First Wives Club," the new musical at the Old Globe. (Earnie Grafton / Union-Tribune) -

## Related news:

- [Who's on 'First'?](#)
- [Globe's 'First Wives' nabs stage vets](#)

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**Where:** 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park

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• **aks623** Today 08:16 AM

Saw the show yesterday. A few small errors, some tightening of the screws before it hits Broadway but what a success this will be. We didn't get to see Sara Chase but her understudy, and she was amazing so Sara must be just as amazing. What a great fun show and I have seen 98% of the musicals that are out there. Way to go!

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# SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

August 6, 2009

NIGHT & DAY

## PLAYBILL

### CRITIC'S CHOICE

**'Coriolanus'** Shakespeare's story of the fierce and unyielding Roman warrior gets a tense and vivid production, its setting (the late-'30s era) stoked by jack-booted generals, pitchfork-wielding plebeians and the scream of air-raid sirens. Director Darko Tresnjak has crafted a lean, propulsive show, with sharp performances by the imposing Greg Derelian in the lead role and the mesmerizing Celeste Ciulla as Volumnia, the mortal-combat version of a stage mom. (Hebert) *Lowell Davies Festival Theatre, 1362 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park. Through Sept. 27. 619-234-5623. \$29-\$68.*

**'Cyrano de Bergerac'** As the poet and swordsman with the oversized nose, Patrick Page demonstrates a panache for the ages. His committed and commanding performance is at the heart of director Darko Tresnjak's lyrical and bewitching Shakespeare Festival staging of the classic Rostand play. (James Hebert) *Lowell Davies Festival Theatre, 1362 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park. Through Sept. 27. 619-234-5623. \$29-\$68.*

**'Twelfth Night'** Director Paul Mullins' stylish and madly inspired update places the comedy on the '50s Italian Riviera, where the sun shines on doo-wop crooners and the glamorously languid. It's like Shakespeare squeezed through a tube of Brylcreem, and Linda Cho's amusing costumes and a strong cast bring the laughs. (Hebert) *Lowell Davies Festival Theatre, 1362 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park. Through Sept. 27. 619-234-5623. \$29-\$68.*

**'Noises Off' -- EXTENDED** Everything goes wrong for the hopeless British theater troupe in Michael Frayn's farce about a farce, but pretty much everything goes right for Cygnet Theatre in its breathlessly funny rendering of the 1982 Tony-winner. The all-star actors make the characters their own, and Sean Murray's direction makes precision of madness. (The revolving set wins its own applause.) (Hebert) *Old Town Theatre, 4040 Twiggs St., Old Town. Through Sept. 6. 619-337-1525. cygnettheatre.com. \$28-\$42.*

**'The First Wives Club - A New Musical' - EXTENDED** A qualified Critic's Choice, mostly because this peppy new musical rolls out the same naggingly small ideas as the so-so movie that spawned it. But new songs by the reunited Holland/Dozier Holland are

well worth a listen, and Rupert Holmes' book (plus a charmingly loopy turn by Sara Chase as an all-purpose Trophy Wife, among other merits) win laughs and could help propel this crowd-pleasing fluffball to Broadway. (Hebert) *The Old Globe, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park. Through Aug. 30. 619-234-5623. theoldglobe.org. \$66-\$92.*

**'Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz'** In its return to San Diego, the "Oz"-minded musical reminds why it has conjured such mad devotion. Despite the sometimes schmaltzy Stephen Schwartz score, snappy songs like "Popular" and the smart snark of Winnie Holzman's book mesh beautifully with the original "Wizard" story and movie, and Katie Rose Clarke (Glinda) and Donna Vivino (Elphaba) make entirely worthy witches. (Hebert) *San Diego Civic Theatre, 1100 Third Ave., Downtown-Gaslamp. Through Aug. 30. 619-570-1100, BroadwaySD.com. \$25-\$138.*

## THEATER REVIEWS



DON BARTLETT/Los Angeles Times

**SISTERHOOD:** Karen Ziemba (Annie), left, Sheryl Lee Ralph (Elyse) and Barbara Walsh (Brenda) create a pact to get back at their husbands.

# It's a starter marriage

The musical 'First Wives Club' could use a little camaraderie and fresh ideas, but it's clear they've only just begun.

**CHARLES McNULTY**  
THEATER CRITIC  
REPORTING FROM SAN DIEGO

One definition of "critic-proof": A dramatic work you're meant to enjoy with your cognitive lamp on dim.

"The First Wives Club," the new Broadway-bound musical based on the 1996 Diane Keaton-Bette Midler-Goldie Hawn middle-aged chick flick and Olivia Goldsmith's stampeding 1992 fictional bestseller, fits this definition to a T. The show, receiving its world premiere at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, is obviously counting on a majority of its audience to arrive in just the right giddy mood of sisterhood solidarity.

In other words, ladies of the producers' dreams, gather your girlfriends for a few fruity cocktails beforehand and enter the theater already squealing with laughter. (White ensembles, like the ones donned by the film's radiant triumvirate, are a plus, though not required.)

Now, if you can overlook the often-generic R&B elevator music of Motown writing legends Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, the cut-and-pasted and cursorily reimaged book by Rupert Holmes, and that the stars (Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and Sheryl Lee Ralph) seem like they barely know one another, you might very well have a night to remember — though you'll [See 'Wives,' Page D9]



# 'Wives' is a marriage in name only

['Wives,' from Page D1] need plenty of aspirin and water the next day.

The good news is that a sizable percentage of theatergoers will still be able to extract some satisfaction from the inherently intoxicating revenge tale of three discarded wives (Annie, Brenda and Elyse) teaching their creepy, philandering husbands a financial lesson they won't soon forget. Who could resist rooting for these conniving old college chums, reunited after the suicide of their dear friend Cynthia (Victoria Matlock) and determined to prove to their worse halves that they can't be replaced by younger, more nubile airheads without neutering divorce settlements?

Sara Chase gamely plays all three home-wrecking vixens, including Annie's therapist, whose counseling method involves personally introducing Annie's husband, Aaron (John Dossett), to the pleasures of leather and whips. If the men come off as caricatured heels — and Brad Oscar's Morty and Kevyn Morrow's Bill are no better to their respective wives, Brenda and Elyse, than Dossett's arrogantly self-absorbed Aaron is to Annie — it only intensifies the delight of their eventual comeuppance.

But it's a shame director Francesca Zambello's lavishly perfunctory production doesn't uncover any more originality than the creators of "9 to 5: The Musical" managed to unearth in their pop-feminist-movie-to-musical-makeover. The default mode here is pallid cliché, and there are too many scenes in which the cast is simply going through the sentimental or ecstatic motions.

Take "Jump for Joy," one of the lesser songs written by the Holland-Dozier-Holland trio that cranked out instant classics for the Supremes, the Four Tops and Marvin Gaye. This



DON BARTLETT/Los Angeles Times

**I CAN EXPLAIN:** Brad Oscar is Morty and Barbara Walsh is wife Brenda in the revenge story "The First Wives' Club."

## 'The First Wives Club'

**Where:** Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

**When:** 7 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends: Aug. 30.

**Price:** \$55 to \$92

**Contact:** (619) 234-5623

**Running time:** 2 hours, 40 minutes

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have run off to meet Duane (Sam Harris, running on campy adrenaline), Brenda's gay BFF who is going to be instrumental in taking their adulterous spouses to the cleaners.

Chris (a vibrant Kat Palaridy), Annie's lesbian daughter who happens to be hanging out at the disco, wants to see her mother lose her inhibitions and cut loose on the dance floor. But this hackneyed number is devoid of any danger or daring, and Lisa Stevens' rah-rah choreography only adds to the euphoria's artificiality.

After a disappointingly plodding first act, all this forced cheer is rather dispiriting, but the musical has a couple of lively segments in store for us. Holmes only smudgily sets up the kooky payback schemes, but that doesn't pre-

vent Oscar from entering into a zone of utter delirium during the making of Mad Morty's Super Bowl commercial for his appliance store. Nor does it stop Ralph's Elyse from giving the giant finger snap to Bill's latest talentless protégée. With a bluesy purr, the confident pro shows the ditsy wannabe how "Love for All Seasons" should be majestically delivered.

But these fresh bits are few and far between, and the production, though sprightly designed by Peter J. Davison (sets), Paul Tazewell (costumes) and Mark McCullough (lighting), tarries in an unelectrical limbo that lacks even the solid sincerity of "One Sweet Moment," the song in which wives and husbands reveal gaping romantic difference.

Furthering the wan impression, the amplification system

fails to give the voices the necessary lift. This is more noticeable than usual because the bland score is all about the whoops and whooshes of the singers, as musical director Ron Melrose (who also did the vocal arrangements and incidental music) surely knows.

Harmlessly entertaining though it may be, this inaugural outing of "The First Wives Club" is not a theatrical marriage made in heaven. Annulment is one way to go, but as moneymaking hope springs eternal for commercial musicals, creative couples therapy might still be able to pull off a miracle. How about we start with the characters played by Walsh, Ziemba and Ralph finally getting acquainted with one another?

charles.mcenulty@latimes.com





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### Theater review: 'The First Wives Club' at the Old Globe

3:15 PM, August 2, 2009



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But these fresh bits are few and far between, and the production, though sprightly designed by Peter J. Davison (sets), Paul Tazewell (costumes) and Mark McCullough (lighting), tarries in an unelectrified limbo that lacks even the solid sincerity of "One Sweet Moment," the song in which wives and husbands reveal their gaping romantic difference.

Furthering the wan impression, the amplification system fails to give the voices the necessary lift. This is more noticeable than usual because the bland score is all about the whoops and whooshes of the singers, as musical director Ron Melrose (who also did the vocal arrangements and incidental music) surely knows.

Harmlessly entertaining though it may be, this inaugural outing of "The First Wives Club" is not a theatrical marriage made in heaven. Annulment is one way to go, but as moneymaking hope springs eternal for commercial musicals, creative couple's therapy might still be able to pull off a miracle. How about we start with the characters played by Walsh, Ziemba and Ralph finally getting acquainted with one another?

-- Charles McNulty

"**The First Wives Club**," Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego. 7 p.m. Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 8 p.m. Thursdays-Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays. Ends: Aug. 30. \$55-\$92. (619) 234-5623. Running time: 2 hours, 40 minutes.

*Photo: Barbara Walsh (Brenda), from left, Sheryl Lee Ralph (Elyse) and Karen Ziemba (Annie) in "The First Wives Club." Credit: Don Bartlett / Los Angeles Times*

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I saw the play this afternoon and could not stop laughing at Sara Chase's performance. Playing multiple key characters, she was the most dynamic actor of the group and really stood out amongst the cast due to her comic timing. The men in the ensemble also did a tremendous job singing and dancing. They weren't sore on the eyes either:( I highly recommend seeing this show!

Posted by: Nancy Boston | [August 02, 2009 at 06:07 PM](#)

I saw this on thursday night and think there's something there. There are definently structural

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## Lack of 'Wives' depth not a deal-breaker



### Drama Desk

By Jenna Long

The Old Globe's major claim to fame has become producing new musicals on their way to Broadway that become a big hit, at least more often than not.

With its new endeavor, "The First Wives Club," the Globe should have another San Diego success — but the jury's still out on how this "movical" will ultimately be received when it's got real competition.

The beauty behind the movie-turned-musical is the following it's already cultivated in the film industry, and the lack of new creative thinking that has to be done when starting a stage production from scratch. Of course, the process isn't without its own challenges.

With these "Wives," while the plot is essentially identical to the movie script, the addition of music and lyrics by the legendary Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland gives the production a sophisticated Motown ambience. Though the soundtrack will not measure up to the reputation of Holland-Dozier-Holland's countless hits, the trio did come up with a few appealing, catchy numbers that entertain, advance the plot, or both.

The most amusing character, Sam Harris' Duane, also has an amazing voice; what starts off as a groan-inducing gay stereotype with lines like "I am your best friend in the world, I just decided," evolves into a talented performance and crucial comic relief.

Sara Chase does triple-duty in the "bimbo" roles, particularly Shelley, the unrefined, Queens-accented, socialite aspirant. Her sexually-charged therapist is more like a female Dr. Phil with an inconsistent Southern twang and a penchant for dropping modern technology terms. We get it, it's 2009.

In fact, it seems like one major change from film to stage is the personification of almost every supporting role — the idiot mistresses, the diabolical husbands — into an over-the-top cliché so that even the people in the

cheap(er) seats can clearly grasp who's good and who's bad.

One redeeming number, though it's probably meant more for humor than to show the other side of the story, has the three husbands singing about how lucky they are to be able to bed the kind of women they're suddenly attracting. Besides the high production value of staging and costumes here, a viewer who's desperate for depth could read this scene as a viable explanation behind the men's callous infidelity — because they can, basically.

In a room full of caricatures, one wife — Annie, portrayed brilliantly by Karen Ziemba, who impressed Globe audiences earlier this year in "Six Degrees of Separation" — depicts a role we can fully absorb because she has the time to show us. In the production's most dramatic and raw scene, Ziemba emanates a real sense of desperation and sadness, showing a capacity to truly love and be heartbroken as she's screwed over (in more ways than one) by her cheating husband.

The reason this bedroom scene really stands out is the inevitable fault of a musical with song on top of song on top of song, leaving so little time for layers of character and plot development through dialogue and action. That's not so much this show's problem as it is the convention of a musical itself — but the truth remains, the movie version of "First Wives" did take more time to show us the "why" and "how," as opposed to just the "what."

For example, the three ladies reunite after two decades, and proceed to convince each other that their marriages are perfect; instantly, a song begins in which those statements reveal themselves to be quite the opposite. In the same scene, which follows their once-close friend's funeral, the women dance with bellhops and start a conga line (in mourning?). And, toward the end, one wife completely dupes her husband into handing over his livelihood; then he admits his wrongs and she takes him back, all in a short matter of minutes.

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Photo: Craig Schwartz

(Left to right) Sara Chase as Shelley, Sam Harris as Duane and Brad Oscar as Morty, setting up sight gags in this scene from the Globe's latest world premiere, "The First Wives Club."

plored plot twists are more acceptable in the musical medium — so thankfully, the production stays away from the three-hour mark — film lovers may be expecting more of an emotional story (complementing the heavy dose of humor) that doesn't lend itself to that same "My Fair Lady" type of simplistic love, or despair for that matter.

Though the opening suicide scene of "Wives" on film doesn't last long, Stockard Channing effectively manages a tragic stare and a haunting intensity behind her reasons for choosing to end her privileged life that, translated to musical standards, now comes across as a one-line realization and falling off a ledge, so hurried (in mid-song) that audience

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The bottom line is, divorce and particularly suicide are rather uncharted musical territory; there has to be a better way of conveying what's behind them to do the subjects and characters more emotional justice.

"Wives" doesn't have it all, but it's got what it needs to thoroughly entertain its audiences. Add to that a jaw-dropping solo by Sheryl Lee Ralph's Elyse, and you might have the best musical in town. On Broadway... we'll see.

"The First Wives Club" is playing through Aug. 30 at the Old Globe Theatre.

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DRAMA DESK

## Lack of 'Wives' depth not a deal-breaker

By JENNA LONG, The Daily Transcript  
 Thursday, August 6, 2009



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Again, while these unexplored plot twists are more acceptable in the musical medium -- so thankfully, the production stays away from the three-hour mark -- film lovers may be expecting more of an emotional story (complementing the heavy dose of humor) that doesn't lend itself to that same "My Fair Lady" type of simplistic love, or despair for that matter.

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*"The First Wives Club" is playing through Aug. 30 at the Old Globe Theatre. Send comments to [jenna.long@sddt.com](mailto:jenna.long@sddt.com).*

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## LEGIT

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# The First Wives Club

**(Old Globe, San Diego; 604 seats; \$92 top)**

By BOB VERINI

An Old Globe presentation of a musical in two acts with book by [Rupert Holmes](#). Music and lyrics by [Brian Holland](#), [Lamont Dozier](#) and [Eddie Holland](#). Directed by Francesca Zambello. Choreography, [Lisa Stevens](#); music direction, vocal arrangements and incidental music, Ron Melrose.

Brenda - [Barbara Walsh](#)  
Annie - [Karen Ziemba](#)  
Elyse - [Sheryl Lee Ralph](#)  
Morty - [Brad Oscar](#)  
Aaron - [John Dossett](#)  
Bill - [Kevyn Morrow](#)  
Leslie/Shelley/Feebee - [Sara Chase](#)  
Duane - [Sam Harris](#)

The female empowerment tuner, lately represented by "Mamma Mia!," "9 to 5" and "Vanities," gains no fresh luster with "[The First Wives Club](#)," which slavishly follows the hit 1996 pic in every respect except the most important one: the emotional grounding to make us care about its titular trio. Constructed around vague hear-me-roar sentiments hammered out in generic Motown terms, this Old Globe tryout tuner is eyeing Gotham, but one is skeptical -- to paraphrase Groucho -- whether audiences will opt to join any club with these ladies as members.



[Karen Ziemba](#), left, [Sheryl Lee Ralph](#) and [Barbara Walsh](#) are members of 'The First Wives Club' in the Old Globe's stage production based on the 1996 pic.

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Like the pic and [Olivia Goldsmith](#)'s original novel, the tuner presents three helpmates/doormats traded in by the husbands they made successful in favor of newer, sleeker models. The suicide of a mutual college friend, another hapless castoff, galvanizes them into what personal-health bestsellers call "self-actualization," particularly the determination to deal out some eye-for-an-eye justice to the cads who done 'em wrong.

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For all its clumsy tonal shifts from overbroad farce to maudlin sentiment (all retained in the musical), the movie cannily emphasizes the wives' need to conquer their own demons before tackling their mates' follies: [Bette Midler](#)'s Brenda retreats into overeating, [Goldie Hawn](#)'s Elise (spelled "Elyse" in this production) into booze and [Diane Keaton](#)'s Annie into paralyzed self-doubt. Only after some all-out brawling and hitting rock bottom do they genuinely bond, vowing to prove they're just as capable and independent as their faithless fellas.

All this would make for a great first-act finale ("Now let's go get 'em!"), except librettist Rupert Holmes has crafted our heroines as one-dimensional victims who drift arbitrarily into their new lives while belting out peppy, generic anthems. (Most of the songs by Motown legends and tuner novices Holland-Dozier-Holland would've graced a '60s Supremes album, but could be allotted to any of the wives interchangeably.) Act one currently sputters to a halt.

Karen Ziemba's Annie is granted some texture (though, alas, few opportunities to dance) as "a recovering timid person," but Barbara Walsh's Brenda snaps off her snide quips with no anguish or fury behind them. Sheryl Lee Ralph's Elyse -- conceived as an aging pop diva, but not given a chance to let 'er rip till act two -- simply trots around looking smug, superior and untroubled.

There's no chemistry among these club members, no logic to their transformation and thus no interest in their quest. They just hug like crazy as the tuner lurches from one outlandish sequence to another.

Mirth strategies include tediously retro gay stereotypes, Sam Harris overdoing his decorator turn ("Do I look like a man who'd get down on his knees?") to pump life into the proceedings. The husbands, fit foils in both novel and movie, are portrayed as libidinous dolts. (The classy John Dossett in S&M leather is a sight to remember, but not fondly.)

Pic's most unattractive feature, its stubborn class snobbery, is here intensified by having Sara Chase overplay all three trophy girls as a misogynist's rogue's gallery: the loudmouth bridge-and-tunnel parvenu ("I'd hug you but my thong broke"); the prim shrink who's really a jezebel; and the talentless bimchette. It's as if no one trusted the First Wives to win our hearts unless the show caricatured and humiliated everyone else.

Helmer Francesca Zambello seems to have served more as a traffic cop than a shaper of emotional highs and lows, expending energy on poorly executed slapstick and an elaborate bit involving a painter's scaffold that wasn't funny in the movie and is even less so now in its (literally) five seconds of stage time.

Peter J. Davison's set, dominated by giant sliding panels resembling glass shower doors, combine with Mark McCullough's lights to offer a mostly attractive pastel evocation of [New York City](#). [Paul Tazewell](#)'s costumes pick up on the overall lampoon mode without especially flattering the wearers, and Lisa Stevens' choreography is perfunctory at best. These characters have little need to celebrate in dance, anyway, as almost every word and lyric is already so aggressively self-congratulatory.

Sets, Peter J. Davison; costumes, Paul Tazewell; lighting, Mark McCullough; sound, Jon Weston; orchestrations, [Harold Wheeler](#); conductor, John Gentry Tennyson; stage manager, Kim Vernace. Opened July 31, 2009. Reviewed Aug. 2; runs through Aug. 30. Running time: 2 HOURS, 35 MIN.

Musical Numbers: "Wedding Belles," "That'll Never Happen to Me," "Have Your Way With Me," "The Art of Loving a Woman," "A Man Like Me," "Have Your Way With Me" (Reprise), "The Need to Be Free," "Ready for a Change," "My Heart Wants to Try One More Time," "Jump for Joy," "I'm So Lucky," "Morty's Got It All," "Today He's a Man," "One Sweet Moment," "Duarte's Song," "Love for All Seasons," "That Was Me Then, This Is Me Now," "[The Auction](#)," "Jump for Joy" (Reprise), "We're So Lucky," "Finale -- Welcome to the Club."

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## Reviews

# *The First Wives Club*

Reviewed By: [Rob Stevens](#) · Aug 2, 2009 · San Diego

Whether [The First Wives Club](#), the screen-to-stage musical now getting its world premiere at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, becomes another *Producers* or another *9 to 5* is hard to tell, but it's definitely a real audience pleaser. Director Francesca Zambello's production certainly flows smoothly, aided immensely by a top-notch cast and design team. Still, the total experience doesn't fulfill its potential, due to a less-than-ideal book and score.



Karen Ziemba, Sheryl Lee Ralph, and Barbara Walsh  
in *The First Wives Club*  
(© Craig Schwartz)

This female empowerment tale of three scorned wives, based on Olivia Goldsmith's novel and the subsequent hit film, focuses on three old friends: Annie (Karen Ziemba), who was a whiz in the ad world until she became an apologetic wife to Aaron (John Dossett); Brenda (Barbara Walsh), who was the brains behind the empire of electronics kingpin Mad Man Morty (Brad Oscar) until his midlife crisis landed him in the arms of a gold digger, and Elyse (Sheryl Lee Ralph), who went from the top of her college class to the top of the pop charts, who reunite at the funeral of their divorced and abandoned pal Cynthia (an impressive Victoria Matlock).

In some ways, book writer Rupert Holmes has actually improved on the original material (and the film's screenplay), adding some nifty one-liners to the script; but he hasn't been able to flesh out the characters and they remain cartoonish. Worse, the score, by legendary Motown composers Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, isn't very successful at establishing character or moving the plot, and the lyrics are often forgettable.

On the plus side, the opening number "Wedding Belles" gets the show off to a rousing start and covers a lot of ground, taking our four sorority sisters from graduation through marriage to impending divorce over a 23-year period. While the second act ballad, "One Sweet Moment," is a haunting refrain on love and marriage, it should come much earlier than the second act. And other than Elyse's eleven o'clock number, "That Was Me Then, This Is Me Now," the wives don't really have much to sell musically. Meanwhile, two of the biggest numbers in the show, "A Man Like Me" and "Duarto's Song," belong to Sam Harris (who really sells them) in the role of faux interior decorator Duane.

Walsh is a real trouper, but it's difficult to buy her Brenda as a frumpy Jewish housewife, no matter how poorly costume designer Paul Tazewell tries to dress her down. And Brenda's constantly vacillating plotline is wearing. Ziemba's Annie just seems to possess too much of a backbone, no matter how many times she's forced to say "I'm sorry." For her part, Ralph gets her character's pop diva attitude totally right, but Elyse doesn't seem to have a weak spot, except maybe misplaced loyalty in her business manager and ex-husband Bill (Kevyn Morrow).

Meanwhile, one comic invention that particularly works here is the casting of Sara Chase as all three of the husband's mistresses (screeching model, controlling therapist, and talent-free singer). The quick-changing Chase makes the most of her number, "I'm So Lucky," with her three men.

Lisa Stevens' choreography is lively and inventive, especially in the second act opener "Jump For Joy." Ron Melrose's musical direction and vocal arrangements sound great, but are way too loud at times and often drown out the singers. But that's a minor problem; whether the creators can make the characters more believable and the show a more heartfelt experience is a bigger issue -- and one they might want to consider tackling before taking the show to the next level.

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## SAN DIEGO

Regional Reviews by Bill Eadie

### *The First Wives Club*

Old Globe Theatre

The most important question to ask about *The First Wives Club*, playing through August 30 at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, is, "Why?" I'm not being sarcastic here: the biggest problem with this Broadway-bound musical is that it doesn't know why it exists.

There are any number of reasons, outside of the potential to make money, for putting on a Broadway show. One would be to tell a compelling tale. Another would be to showcase the talents of one or more individuals. A third would be to highlight some terrific music. A fourth (and most important, potentially) would be to provide a high level of entertainment for audiences in what has traditionally been the center of theatre in the U. S.



**Barbara Walsh, Sheryl Lee Ralph, and Karen Ziemba**

Unfortunately, *The First Wives Club* fails to at least some degree on at least three of these four reasons for its existence.

First, there is no compelling tale. The source material is the 1996 film by the same name, which, in turn, was based on Olivia Goldsmith's bestselling 1992 novel. Ms. Goldsmith, who had to rebuild her life after a divorce left her virtually penniless, wrote a feminist revenge story about three women who banded together to get back at their husbands after they found themselves in a similar predicament. By 1996, the material probably seemed at least somewhat dated, but the film was saved by strong performances from leads Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton, along with great comedic support from the likes of Maggie Smith, Sarah Jessica Parker, Stockard Channing, and Marcia Gay Harden. By 2009, the story seems even more dated (albeit set in the present), and though Rupert Holmes has done an expert job of trimming, rearranging, plugging up holes and adding a bunch of clever one-liners, the basic arc of the story remains unchanged.

The film succeeded on the strength of its performances, particularly from its audience-drawing stars. So, what does the musical's creative team do? They hire three entirely capable Broadway-level musical theatre actresses (Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and Sheryl Lee Ralph) none of whose names are likely to go above the title on the theatre's marquee. And then they don't trust these entirely capable Broadway-level performers to rise to star level performances by saddling their characters with too many complexities to overcome. Ms. Ziemba fares worst—her character isn't even given her own song. Ms. Walsh's character does get (mostly) her own song, the first act closer, "My Heart Wants to Try One More Time," and Ms. Walsh does a fine job with threading her way through the

emotional turmoil her character is asked to manifest. Of the three, however, Ms. Ralph fares best, perhaps because her character seems lifted almost directly from *Dreamgirls*' Deena Jones, a role Ms. Ralph originated in 1981. She also gets the eleven o'clock number, "That Was Me Then, This Is Me Now," and she knocks it out of the park. Unfortunately, the number comes at 10:30 in the storyline, so its effect is a muted one.

When you don't let the stars be stars, the path is clear for the featured performers to register, and Sam Harris as Duane the decorator nearly walks off with the show as a result. So would have Victoria Matlock as the suicidal Cynthia, had she been given a bit more stage time. It's fine to have a superior Agnes Gooch in your cast, but if Mame and Vera aren't the stars, the show doesn't work.

If you thought that the opportunity to create a musical with original songs written by Motown legends Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland would be a great idea, you'd be right. The heyday for these folks may have been the 1960s, but they haven't lost the ability to embed those terrific pop hooks into their songs, even as they switch to more of a musical comedy style of writing. I have only two complaints about the music: first, there's a bit too much of it, and the pacing of the plot drags as a result (in particular, the show could lose choreographer Lisa Stevens' dance numbers altogether); and second, the otherwise admirable orchestrations by Harold Wheeler include back-up singers (un-credited in the program—perhaps they are ensemble members) in the pit whose vocals interfere with, rather than support, what the soloist is doing on stage. As good as this effort is, however, it isn't good enough to carry the show.

Which leaves us with overall entertainment value, and here the production certainly tries hard. Peter J. Davison provides sleek sliding panels to create the variety of settings necessary for a cinematic story, Paul Tazewell dresses the cast, particularly the leads, in costumes that are mostly stylish and mostly flatter, and they are ably supported by Mark McCullough's lighting design and Jon Weston's sound design. But Francesca Zambello's direction mainly consists of traffic control, and there are very few clever touches, most of which serve to distract from a few slow set changes. The show's exterior glistens with a shiny surface, but underneath is a weak story that is not compensated by clever touches in the book or by star-level performances. The creative team needs to have a better sense of why this show should work in order for it to have a chance for success in New York.

The Old Globe presents *The First Wives Club: A New Musical*. Now playing through August 30 at the Old Globe Theatre. Tickets: \$66-\$92. Box office: (619) 23-GLOBE or online at [The Old Globe's website](http://www.theoldglobe.org). Music and lyrics by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland. Book by Rupert Holmes. Directed by Francesca Zambello. Scenic design by Peter J. Davison, costume design by Paul Tazewell, lighting design by Mark McCullough, sound design by Jon Weston, music direction, vocal arrangements and incidental music by Ron Melrose, and choreography by Lisa Stevens.

With Barbara Walsh (Brenda), Karen Ziemba (Annie), Sheryl Lee Ralph (Elyse), Brad Oscar (Morty), John Dossett (Aaron), Kevyn Morrow (Bill), Sara Chase (Leslie/Shelley/Feebee), Sam Harris (Duane), Victoria Matlock (Cynthia), Kat Palardy (Chris), Ari Lerner/Austyn Myers (Jason), Bob Gaynor (Thad), Matthew LaBanca (Auctioneer), and ensemble members Michelle Aravena, Thursday Farrar, Martin Samuel, and Richard E. Waits.

# The First Wives Club

StageSceneLA
Current Review
Archives
# A
B C
DEF
GHIJK
LM
NOPQR
ST
UVWXYZ
Interviews
Best Of Lists
Upcoming/Unre
Contact



Take a hit movie about a trio of 40something wives getting even with husbands who've abandoned them for younger women, add songs written by a trio who can truly be called legendary, cast the show with some of Broadway's finest performers—and you have *The First Wives Club*, a thoroughly entertaining new musical now in its pre-Broadway run at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, under the brisk direction of Francesca Zambello.

You remember Annie, Brenda, and Elyse, portrayed in the 1996 film by Diane Keaton, Bette Midler, and Goldie Hawn, right? Annie's the all-American housewife and mother prone to apologize for everything she does or has ever done. Brenda's the Jewish wife whose chubby hubby stars in self-promoting TV commercials for his eponymous appliance store. Elyse is the glamorous movie star who doesn't look a day older than she did when she was 20, thanks to her plastic surgeon.

They're all back, brought to musical comedy life by Tony winner Karen Ziemba and Tony nominees Barbara Walsh and Sheryl Lee Ralph. The three jilted wives are every bit as set on revenge as were their film counterparts, and who can blame them? Annie's husband Aaron (Tony nominee John Dossett) has left her for their sexy marriage counselor, who seems to feel that her dalliance with Annie's hubby is the best way for Annie to breathe new life into her life. Brenda's husband Morty (Tony nominee Brad Oscar) has taken up with the razor-voiced spokesmodel for his TV spots, a gal with an IQ the size of a peanut. Recording star Elyse's husband/manager Bill (Kevyn Morrow) has traded in Wife Number One for (you guessed it) a younger model, a teen-singer newly renamed Feebee.

At college, the now vengeful trio were part of an inseparable foursome completed by fellow co-ed Cynthia (Victoria Matlock), but time and marriage have kept them apart for nearly twenty-five years. Then, Cynthia's suicide



reunites Annie, Brenda, and Elyse at their former chum's funeral, and it's as if the years had never kept them apart. A letter from Cynthia to the three survivors convinces them not to take their husbands' betrayal lying down, and the trio hatch a plan to get back what's theirs, and then some, abetted by Brenda's gay friend Duane Ferguson (Tony nominee Sam Harris), who delightedly assumes the identity of "world renowned interior designer Duarto Ferghini," phony Italian accent and all.



The First Wives Club's three female stars are all genuine triple-threats at the top of their craft. Ziemba so perfectly captures Annie's sweetness and her overly self-effacing manner that it is a joy to see her finally let out her inner prizefighter. As Brenda, the terrific Walsh recalls her Tony award-nominated turn as Trina in *Falsettos*, both wives dealing with the death of a marriage they'd thought would last forever. Divalicious Ralph is essentially playing a version of herself, and no one does Sheryl Lee Ralph better than the glamorous Miss Ralph. All three actresses create real, three-dimensional characters without ever imitating their screen counterparts, and each shows off powerhouse pipes, particularly Walsh in "My Heart Wants To Try One More Time" and Ralph in the show-stopping Act Two ballad "That Was Me Then, This Is Me Now," a number sure to be included in the diva's next nightclub act.

The husbands all do tip-top work as well—Dossett as the louse who can follow a romantic night of lovemaking with his wife with a sweetly uttered "I want a divorce," muscular Morrow as the slick husband/manager of a superstar who manages to say with a straight face that their separation is a chance for the two of them to somehow grow closer, and Oscar as the lumpy appliance salesman turned flashy red-fright-wigged star of his store's TV commercials. Statuesque, big-voiced Matlock makes the most of her limited (by suicide) stage time as Cynthia, and cute Kat Palardy is also very good (and funny) as Brenda's lesbian daughter Chris.

The First Wives Club's most memorable performances come from supporting players Harris and soon-to-be Broadway newcomer Sara Chase. Harris, a star since his 1984 *Star Search* victory, is the perfect choice for Dwayne turned Duarto. From the moment Dwayne dons fancy designer duds and a fake Italian accent peppered with whatever Italian words he's learned from restaurant menus, Harris steals every scene he's in, and brings the house down with his signature high notes in "A Man Like Me" and "Duarto's Song." Having only quickly perused the program's *Cast Of Characters* before the performance, I did not realize until curtain call that one amazing comedienne (Chase) was portraying all three mistresses (sultry therapist Leslie, strident spokesmodel Shelley, and dumb bunny singer Feebee), giving the kind of performances that get at the very least a Tony nomination.

Songs for *The First Wives Club* are the creations of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland (better known as Holland-Dozier-Holland), who in 1963 started writing Top 10 hits for the Supremes, the Four Tops, and just about every other Motown star—while still in their early 20s. The trio still have the magic touch, which can be heard in the seductive "Have Your Way With Me," the joyously bouncy "Jump For Joy," and the powerhouse ballad "One Sweet Moment," featuring the voices of the three wives and their exes joined in glorious six-part harmony. I can hardly wait for a Cast Recording of show's twenty new Holland-Dozier-Holland gems.

The First Wives Club somehow manages to be the kind of splashy, big cast musical that makes audiences feel they've gotten their money's worth, yet never sacrifices the intimacy of its very personal storyline. It's also a great vehicle for its eight sensational ensemble performers (Michelle Aravena, Thursday Farrar, Bob Gaynor, Matthew LaBanca, Matlock, Palardy, Martin Samuel, and Richard E. Waits), giving each of them his or her own track of highly varied roles to portray, as well as assignments understudying the show's leads.

Choreographer Lisa Stevens has sprinkled sparkly dance numbers throughout

the evening, most notably in the Act Two nightclub opener "Jump For Joy." Ron Melrose does stellar triple duty as music director, vocal arranger, and composer of incidental music. John Gentry Tennyson conducts the nine-piece orchestra with panache.

Peter J. Davidson's gorgeous scenic design with its sliding Plexiglas panels in front of a stylized New York skyline is the kind of set that only a Broadway designer on a Broadway budget can create. Costumes by Paul Tazewell, lighting by Mark McCullough, and sound design by Jon Weston are equally topnotch.


As a big fan of movie version of The First Wives Club, I'm delighted to report that its musical adaptation is an all-around crowd-pleaser, Rupert Holmes' book retaining the film's memorable moments (Shelley's inability to say her one and only line in Morty's latest TV commercial, the three first wives escaping from a penthouse apartment as window washers, Shelley bidding away Morty's fortune at an auction of worthless knickknacks, etc.), while at the same time tweaking the plot just enough to make this musical a fresh delight. Married heterosexual males in the audience may squirm a teensy bit, but they, their wives and just about everyone else will likely have a ball at The First Wives Club.

Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego. Through August 30. Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 7:00, Thursdays and Fridays at 8:00, Saturdays at 2:00 and 8:00, Sundays at 2:00 and 7:00. Reservations: 619 234-5623 [www.oldglobe.org](http://www.oldglobe.org)

--Steven Stanley  
August 2, 2009

Photos: Craig Schwartz

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"The First Wives Club." (Photo by Craig Schwartz)

Exes and Ohs

THE SHOW: "The First Wives Club," a Broadway-bound world premiere musical, at the Old Globe

A new musical is a gargantuan undertaking that requires gobs of talent, money and time. A world premiere is risky business. A theater brings in the best people available, and hopes for the best. It isn't always a winner right out of the gate.

And so it goes with "The First Wives Club," adapted from the 1996 movie, which was inspired by the 1992 book, the debut novel of the late Olivia Goldsmith, who died in 2004. Both sources had cult followings among middle-aged women.

And after substantial re-working, it's possible that this show will, too. Play to your base, as they say.

Here's the setup: Elise, Brenda and Annie were college friends, but they haven't seen each other in decades. They reunite at the funeral of their fourth musketeer, who committed suicide after her husband left her for a newer model. Turns out, they all have that particular ache in common, being dumped for younger, sleeker arm-candy. Each of the three also helped launch the successful career of her philandering ingrate of a husband. Now they want revenge and they want to get even.



During a sneak preview not long ago, the creators of the new musical claimed vociferously that this version of the story wasn't going to be about retaliation and retribution; it was about empowerment. Sure looks like vengeance to me. The gals get their own lives and careers back on track, but they make sure to bring their husbands down while they're at it. All in the name of self-respect - and creating a Women's Center in their late friend's name, to help other members of 'The Club.' See? Women of a certain age are gonna love this. But I don't know about the young ones. There's nothing fresh, new, hip or insightful here. It's an old story, told in an old-fashioned way.

The book, by multiple Tony Award-winner Rupert Holmes ("Drood," "Curtains," "Say Goodnight, Gracie") follows the original story fairly closely, except it makes the women even more disparate. There's still the mousy, eternally apologizing WASP (Diane Keaton in the film; Karen Ziemba here), and the mouthy, wisecracking Jewish suburbanite (Bette Midler in the movie; Barbara Walsh here). It's the



wealthy fading star (Goldie Hawn) who's changed the most. Now she's a well-heeled singer (Sheryl Lee Ralph) whose husband (Kevyn Morrow) was her manager, now hanging with a younger - and far less talented — vocalist. Each of the guys - gamely and engagingly played by Brad Oscar, John Dossett and Morrow - is a slimeball, who treats his First Wife appallingly. One (Dossett), even lures her to a hotel room and makes passionate love to her, before telling her he wants a divorce. Oh, and the woman he's seeing? Their mutual - and decidedly unscrupulous — marriage therapist.

Poor Brenda (Walsh) has to put up with her lovesick ex, Mad Morty (Oscar, wild and funny in Goldsmith's obvious riff on the old New York appliance-seller, Crazy Eddie), showing up at their son's bar mitzvah with his ditsy, short-skirted shiksa in tow. What indignities these women are made to suffer! Too bad we don't really know them well enough to care.

[SDNN Radio:](#)



Their First Husbands actually get one of the cuter numbers, "I'm So Lucky," in which each pumps himself up for his good fortune in snagging a hottie. All three paramours are delightfully played by Sara Chase.

Most of the score, written by the legendary Motown team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland (who created major hits for the likes of The Supremes and The Four Tops), is bland and forgettable. It doesn't sound like R&B or Broadway. More like cabaret concert numbers. Too many anthemic ballads, and only two energetic chorus numbers: "The Auction" (clever) and "Jump for Joy" (derivative). No show-stoppers. And most of the emotions feel forced.

There's an excess of secondary and tertiary characters. The best of them are: the flamboyantly gay Duane (Sam Harris, amusing in a wildly over-the-top performance that feels and looks like he's channeling Norbert Leo Butz in "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels"); and Chris (petite, perky Kat Palardy), the lesbian daughter of Annie (Ziemba). Jews, blacks, gays, WASPs - everyone gets a stereotypical turn.



Pat Launer

The choreography (Lisa Stevens) is uninspired. And though the men cavort capably, the women barely move, which is odd, since Ziemba won her Tony in the dance musical, "Contact." Francesca Zambello, an acclaimed opera and theater director, doesn't sufficiently enhance the women's connections or pump up the energy, though the cast looks like they're trying really hard to be ebullient. The orchestrator (Harold Wheeler) and musical director/vocal arranger (Ron Melrose) are the best in the business. This is a gathering of impressive talent, and yet the outcome falls flat.



The most Broadway-ready part of the production is the sets and lighting. The scenic design (Peter J. Davison) is dazzling, with its diamond-shaped iris expanding and contracting to reveal a range of stunning views of New York. The lighting (Mark McCullough) highlights the multiple playing spaces in varied and imaginative ways.

Truly, the most exciting part of the endeavor is allowing San Diegans, once again, to see a new show at its inception. This unique opportunity, which locals obviously love, celebrates and re-affirms our status as the nation's number one exporter of shows to the Great White Way. Bravo to us!

THE LOCATION: The Old Globe Theatre in Balboa Park. (619) 23-GLOBE; [www.theoldglobe.org](http://www.theoldglobe.org)

THE DETAILS: Tickets: \$66-92. Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m., Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m., through August 30.

*ADDENDUM: Life imitates art once again. In Wisconsin this week, a married man who planned to rendezvous with one of his handful of lovers at an eastern Wisconsin motel instead found himself bound, blindfolded and assaulted by a group of women out for revenge. According to court reports, "four women, including his wife, showed up to humiliate the man, who*

## THEATER REVIEW

# 'First Wives Club' entertains only in spurts

By ANNE MARIE WELSH  
For the North County Times

The playful, popular 1996 movie romp "The First Wives Club" ends with three soul-sisters celebrating their liberation to the tune of Lesley Gore's '60s girl-power anthem, "You Don't Own Me."

So why not go further? Cash in on the movie-to-musical vogue and create a stage "First Wives" enlisting the talents of other '60s songwriting legends, Motown's Lamont Dozier and Brian and Eddie Holland. What must have sounded like a good idea at the time hasn't panned out, at least not yet, in "The First Wives Club: A New Musical," which opened to a raucous, rapturous reception at the Old Globe over the weekend.

At this point in the show's pre-Broadway development, "First Wives: the Musical" entertains only fitfully. What's best onstage has little to do with the source movie, its dated material, or for that matter, with the H-D-H songwriting team that generated hit after hit for the Supremes and the Four Tops, among others, yet here created a surprisingly bland, homogenized score.

The enjoyable, engaging moments at the Globe derive from shrewd individual performers, a couple of comedy numbers that showcase them and a convincingly belted power ballad ("My Heart Wants to Try One More Time") that closes the overlong first act. Actor Brad Oscar, for instance, whose breakthrough came as the mad pigeon-loving Nazi in the Broadway version of "The Producers," here shows up as Mad Morty, a philandering husband in a fright wig, pitching appliances in a TV ad with his memory-challenged bimbo mistress, Shelley.

That kind of expert zest and flair is too often missing from the production directed by Francesca Zambello. Also absent are memorable show tunes, a witty and



Barbara Walsh as Brenda, Sheryl Lee Ralph as Elyse and Karen Ziemba as Annie in the world premiere of "The First Wives Club — A New Musical," running through Aug. 30 at The Old Globe.

Photo by Craig Schwartz

### THE FIRST WIVES CLUB — A NEW MUSICAL

**WHEN** 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; extended through Aug. 30

**WHERE** Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

**TICKETS** \$55-\$92

**INFO** 619-234-5623 or oldglobe.org

well-constructed book, and crucially, the confidence about comic tone that made such screen-to-stage transfers as "Hairspray" and "The Producers" into bona-fide Broadway gushers.

The "First Wives" movie clocked in at a fast-paced 100 minutes and provided a great vehicle for Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton as three college roommates who reunite in middle age at the funeral of a friend. They discover that each of them, including the suicide in the casket, has been dumped by her husband for a younger hottie.

They take their sweet revenge, but discover something sweeter in the process: the synergy of sisterhood and the freedom that, yes, money can buy. All this, plus some zippy one-liners, sight gags and cameos made for a buoyant, none too serious celluloid entertainment.

The musical's book writer, Rupert Holmes, a Tony-

winner for "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," updates the action to a vague present day, yet retains the basics of the movie plot, itself derived from an earlier beach novel by Olivia Goldsmith. It's beyond credulity that female college graduates in 1986 would have ditched careers for the ambitious husbands ditching them now.

The plodding first act tends to recount rather than dramatize the action. The show also changes the Goldie Hawn character into a black diva, Elyse, aka The Duchess, played strutting and over-the-top by the multitalented Sheryl Lee Ralph.

Writer Holmes also asks us to take seriously the least plausible aspects of the movie: this jaunty trio uses the money they inveigle away from their wandering hubbies to fund a crisis center for women with low self-esteem. There the stage show ends with a tritely staged "Welcome to the Club" finale.

Karen Ziemba, a Tony-winner for "Contact" and recently even better here in a John Guare play, is almost as terrific as Annie, the wife made apologetic by a lifetime of domesticity with ad man Aaron (John Dossett). Her first big scene ("Have

Your Way With Me") reveals hilariously both her sexual timidity and her therapist Leslie's voracious appetite.

Sara Chase, who plays Leslie, is triple-cast as that man-hunting shrink and two other bimbotic girlfriends. A sublimely gifted chameleon, Chase is utterly different as the screeching would-be actress Shelley kept by Morty, and as the appallingly untalented underage singer championed by Elyse's suave, straying husband/manager Bill (Kevyn Morrow). This show could make Chase a star.

Similarly, spirits lifted whenever Sam Harris was on as Duane, the shape-shifting and inventive gay friend of Morty's dumped wife, Brenda.

Barbara Walsh gets the unenviable job of following Bette Midler in the role of Brenda, the too-true wife whose Mafia uncle made her Morty's fortune in appliances.

Walsh is good, despite some truly dowdy costumes; and she's more than good in that Act 1 closer, "My Heart Wants to Try One More Time." Her soulful delivery almost makes you forget the masochism at the song's core.

The three husbands and three wives get a nicely harmonized sextet "One Sweet Moment" in the more watchable second act. And the weasel husbands are soundly and hilariously mocked in their flex-my-muscles number, "I'm So Lucky." The jazzy, smooth-voiced Morrow is especially funny here as the macho Bill, rhythmically flexing his dancing pecs until he gets what he deserves when Elyse takes charge of her own talent — and their money.

With all this talent assembled, including top orchestrator Harold Wheeler, it would be nice to think the show has a shot at streamlining itself, building chemistry between the female leads, and finding the right, light tone before it heads to New York. Maybe, but on opening night, some vacuum at the center of the material seemed to suck the comic vitality from "The First Wives Club" instead of giving it a new life onstage.

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ANNE MARIE WELSH - For the North County Times | Posted: Saturday, August 8, 2009 10:05 pm | No Comments Posted

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Sheryl Lee Ralph as Elyse and Karen Ziemba as Annie (both standing on the platform) in the world premiere of "The First Wives Club ---- A New Musical," running through Aug. 30 at the Old Globe. (Photo by Craig Schwartz)

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Where: Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

Tickets: \$55-\$92

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Tuesday, August 4, 2009

## 'First Wives Club' makes divorce trivial

New musical is flawed but  
connects with its audience:  
wronged women.

By **PAUL HODGINS**

The Orange County Register

There are times when a poor theater critic feels helpless against a show's built-in satisfaction quotient.

Case in point: "The First Wives Club," a Broadway-bound musical making its world premiere at San Diego's reliable Tony-making factory, the Old Globe.

There's plenty that's creaky, cheesy and slapdash about this female-empowering revenge fantasy, based on the 1996 film about a trio of women who get back at the husbands who deserted them.

Rupert Holmes' book doesn't delve any deeper than it has to, and the jokes come at

you with the subtlety and grace of a cargo ship. Its comic backdrops – a therapist's office, an advertising agency, an art auction – are so quaintly dated they seem like outtakes from episodes of "That Girl."

Though the women have been updated from boomers to aging Gen Xers and a few details have been changed, there's still an antique feel to the story's old-time feminist sensibilities.

And the musical team, surprisingly, whiffs more than it connects. Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland were responsible for some of the greatest Motown hits ever penned, including the Supremes' "You Can't Hurry Love," "Come See About Me" and "Stop in the Name of Love" and the Four Tops' "I Can't Help Myself." Yet their pop-infused score is surprisingly bloodless and devoid of hook-ish tunes.

But this is a vehicle aimed squarely at a specific demographic: middle-aged women, many of whom in this divorce-happy era feel the same kind of animus toward their exes that these gals harbor. It was clear at Sunday's matinee performance that with its intended audience the show was hitting one home run after another, way out of the park.

Brenda, Annie and Elyse (Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and Sheryl Lee Ralph) are former Wellesley sisters, class of '86, who went their own ways in life despite their

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intense college bond. They're brought together by the suicide of the fourth member of their close-knit group, Cynthia (Victoria Matlock), who jumps off a roof early in the story, despondent after her husband leaves her (but not too despondent to sing a farewell verse or two before taking the plunge, and good thing, too – Matlock has a terrific voice).

The three survivors are dealing with troubles of their own. Brenda's husband Morty (Brad Oscar), who owns a growing discount store empire, is stepping out with a crass young employee who possesses the voice of a buzz saw and the couth of a coyote. Annie's husband Aaron (John Dossett), with whom she has helped build a successful career in advertising, is having an affair with a lusty therapist who is treating them both.

Only Elyse, a chart-topping soul singer, is still happily married – but not for long. Shortly after the trio drink a little post-funeral champagne, kick up their heels and promise to rekindle old friendships, Elyse discovers that her hubbie-manager, Bill (Kevyn Morrow), has left her for a young singer in his stable.

Will these plucky dames allow a trio of heels to send them leaping off a roof? Not when the song list includes "The Need To Be Free" and "Ready For A Change." The songwriters

have a weakness for anthemic declarations of girl power, and there's an acrid whiff of revenge wrapped up in all that "I will not be denied" chest beating.

The wronged women come up with an ingenious plot that gives the loutish men their comeuppance, humiliates all slutty mistresses, restores or creates wonderful careers for them and honors their late pal Cynthia in the process. And Annie even bonds with her prickly lesbian daughter Chris (Kat Palardy), who chirpily participates in the destruction of her dastardly dad's advertising career. If you like your happy endings tied up tighter than a sailor's knot, this is the show for you.

Director Francesa Zambello, a veteran of both the opera world and high-profile musical theater, doesn't have a lot to work with, and she fails to make much of what's there; her work seems uncomfortable, as if she's well outside her métier.

The cast of Broadway veterans includes Tony winner Ziemba and reliably entertaining talent such as Walsh, Ralph and Tony winner Sam Harris as Duane, a gay interior designer whose gift for disguise gives him a crucial role in the revenge plot and plenty of gag time. Harris is much funnier than his lines.

The female leads seem a little flummoxed by characters that provide nothing to sink their

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teeth into. Brenda, Annie and Elyse are fuzzy around the edges – wronged-woman archetypes – and they defy the humanizing talents of even gifted actresses such as these. Sara Chase has much more fun playing all three Jezebel roles.

If you're a woman of a certain age and marital status, none of these imperfections will matter, of course. Revenge, as they say, is a dish best served cold – but it seems to do just fine when served sloppily, too.

**Contact the writer:** 714-796-7979 or  
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Archive for the 'Theater by Paul Hodgins' Category

### **'First Wives Club' is no classic, but it'll be a hit with divorcees**

August 4th, 2009, 1:15 pm by [Paul Hodgins](#)



In its world premiere at the Old Globe, **"The First Wives Club"** features an impressive cast of Tony winners, a legendary Motown songwriting team and a celebrated director. But the whole is considerably less than the sum of its parts.

The show seems to connect, though, with its core audience: females of a certain age who can appreciate a revenge story about three women who pay their spouses back after messy divorces.

[Read the review.](#)

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### **What ails the arts in O.C.? Part 2**

August 3rd, 2009, 1:53 pm by [Paul Hodgins](#)

Here's the second in a series of questions I recently asked of two prominent Orange County arts figures (Center president Terrence W. Dwyer and Arts Orange County executive director Richard Stein) about the perilous state of the the arts in O.C. Their answers follow the break.

**Q. Were some arts groups better prepared than others for this recession? If so, why?**

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# feature

## 'The First Wives Club' – A New Musical

BY JEAN LOWERISON

Published Thursday, 13-Aug-2009 in [issue 1129](#)

If hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, what are we to fear from three women so insulted? Revenge, of course, in the form of a new musical version of *The First Wives Club*. Based on the novel by Olivia Goldsmith and the 1996 film starring Goldie Hawn, Bette Midler and Diane Keaton, the Old Globe Theatre's latest Broadway hope is a musical version with a book by Rupert Holmes and songs by Motown greats Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland. Veteran opera and stage director Francesca Zambello helms the production.



These three college buddies – the painfully shy Annie (Karen Ziemba), Jewish mom Brenda (Barbara Walsh) and R&B star Elyse (Sheryl Lee Ralph) – meet at the funeral of the fourth, Cynthia (Victoria Matlock), who couldn't take it anymore and jumped off a building.

After trying to convince themselves and each other of their "perfect" lives, they let down and admit that they're all married to rats who are fooling around on the side. What to do? Why ... sing, of course, and dance a little, and get revenge in the form of punishing divorces.

If you saw the film, you've seen the show – the plots are that similar. The unanswered question about both is this: are the "problems" of three rich women worth two and a half hours of your time?

My answer is no, but that was definitely a minority opinion in the opening night crowd. This musical version adds unnecessary length and repetition, and fails even to fix the film's goes-nowhere subplot involving the gay daughter.

***The First Wives Club.***  
**Based on the novel by**  
**Olivia Goldsmith and the**  
**1996 film starring Goldie**  
**Hawn, Bette Midler and**  
**Diane Keaton, the Old**  
**Globe Theatre's latest**  
**Broadway hope is a**  
**musical version.**

Ziemba, Walsh and Ralph do as well as anyone could with these roles. But let's face it, this is a one-trick pony with no surprises, and that doesn't leave much room for innovation.

For my money, two smaller character roles are more riveting than the plotting of the wives. One is Dr. Leslie Rosen (Sara Chase), the shrink who both attempts to counsel Annie and is sleeping with her husband Aaron, and whose exaggeratedly erotic version of "Have Your Way With Me" nearly brings down the house. (Chase also plays the other two bimbettes.) The other is Sam Harris, trying a little too hard to be funny as fussy gay interior decorator Duane, but amusing later as upscale Italian designer Duarto, complete with phony accent and extravagant gestures.

H/D/H have contributed a serviceable score with a few memorable songs. My favorites are the poignant, almost operatic sextet "One Sweet Moment" and the rowdy "Payback's a Bitch."

I'd consider cutting "My Heart Wants to Try One More Time" at the end of act one that seems to go on forever. "Jump for Joy" seems to add little, but is reprised nonetheless, and "Morty's Got It All," a too-long old joke of a number in which Brenda's husband Morty can't get the commercial for his electronics store finished because bimchette Shelley (Chase) can't get her single line straight.

Still, this has a fine cast dominated by Broadway veterans and a great design team: Peter J. Davison (set), Paul Tazewell (costumes) and Mark McCulloch (lighting). That it's commercial fluff probably won't impede its move to

Broadway, but it'll require considerable work first.

*The First Wives Club* has been extended through Sunday, Aug. 30, at the Old Globe Theatre. Shows Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; matinées Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets call 619-238-0043 or visit [www.theoldglobe.org](http://www.theoldglobe.org).

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#### FILM REVIEWS

### The First Wives Club -- Theater Review

By Les Spindle, August 05, 2009 03:38 ET



"The First Wives Club"

preclude boxoffice success, particularly when such stars as Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton lend their cachet. This latest recycling (book by Rupert Holmes; pop score by Motown tunesmiths Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland) proves that crassness has no limits. As if Holmes' crushingly unimaginative regurgitation of the film script wasn't enough, tedious songs further sabotage the enterprise.

Formulaic to the hilt, this version offers ciphers in place of characters and sloppily related plot points rather than narrative fluidity. The arbitrarily inserted songs don't illuminate the story or characters. There are at least a half-dozen "I am woman, hear me roar" ballads that are hard to tell apart, two or three uptempo showstopper wannabes and a handful of other superfluous numbers. The songwriters enjoyed chart-topping triumphs in the 1960s, writing for the likes of the Supremes, but they seem oblivious to the craft of fashioning book-musical songs, and apparently no one involved was able to provide guidance.

Seasoned performers make futile attempts to energize the proceedings. As the crusading wives, Karen Ziemba, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Barbara Walsh give everything they have to Lisa Stevens' trite choreography and the colorless songs, to little avail. Playing the louts who left the wives for younger women, John Dossett and Kevyn Morrow huff and puff their way through misfired gags, while Brad Oscar generates modest laughs in a zany commercial-filming sequence. Sara Chase's portrayals of all three "other women" never advance beyond clichés. As a flamboyant designer, the usually terrific Sam Harris is stuck playing a one-note fag stereotype.

Even the design elements lack inspiration; this is a surprisingly bland-looking Broadway-bound confection. Think of director Francesca Zambello's world-premiere rendition as the "Stepford Wives" of women-empowerment musicals: Watch it jerk and sputter as its misaligned ingredients short-circuit.

*Venue: Old Globe Theatre, San Diego (Through Aug. 23)*
*Cast: Sam Harris, Brad Oscar, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba*
*Director: Francesca Zambello*
*Choreographer: Lisa Stevens*
*Lighting designer: Mark McCullough*
*Set designer: Peter J. Davison*
*Costume designer: Paul Tazewell*
*Book: Rupert Holmes*
*Music-lyrics: Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, Eddie Holland*
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## theater review



(Left to right) Karen Ziemba as Annie, Sheryl Lee Ralph as Elyse and Barbara Walsh as Brenda in *The First Wives Club* at The Old Globe. (Craig Schwartz/The Old Globe)

# First Wives Club not ready for Broadway

BY PATRICIA MORRIS BUCKLEY

**T**he ads for the Old Globe Theatre's "First Wives Club" say it is Broadway bound, and that may be true, but don't count on it happening anytime soon. There's a lot that really works in this show, but still much that needs to be worked on.

Most people know "The First Wives Club" from the film version with Goldie Hawn, Diane Keaton and Bette Midler. The film is based on a novel by Olivia Goldsmith, written after being dumped by her husband. Her novel played out a revenge fantasy that she couldn't live out in real life.

The story begins with four college roommates who drift apart after getting married. They meet up again at the funeral of Cynthia, who dived off a tall building when her husband left her for a much younger woman. The remaining roommates are timid Annie, who gave up her career to marry an ad man, Brenda, who has a 13-year-old son with the head of a discount electronics chain, and Elyse, now a famous singer (in the movie, she was a film star). They too suddenly find themselves in similar single-like situations and decide to make their exes pay for leaving them.

The first act is what needs the most polishing – super-sized polishing, to be exact. The music misses many of the emotional beats and the buildup to the revenge plot is far too slow. Rupert Holmes' book (the nonmusical part of the show) is sharp and witty, and his ending is extremely satisfying. But the three women dither for far too long as they decide whether to act or not. It's the revenge plot that hooks us and it's not really introduced until the final moments of the first act.

The songs are by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, one of the hottest song writing teams in rock and roll ("Baby Love," "I Hear a Symphony," "You Can't Hurry Love," among many others) but they seem to struggle with the musical theatre form. Their best tunes are the showstoppers, such as "A Man Like Me," a campy and upbeat song sung by Brenda's interior designer friend, Duane. But the emotional moments seem to slip by them and that's where music works best in a musical. A song that

refrains with "I'm ready for a change in my life," 16 times in a row just can't capture what those words really mean.

To give them credit, the second act music is far better, especially Annie's soul-baring "This is Me Now" and Elyse's "That Was Me Then, This Is Me Now." When the emotional beats are there, then the showstoppers feel more organic to the storyline. One last quibble is that every character seems to get at least one song, which makes several of them feel like filler.

One interesting note about the production is how it makes eye candy of most of the male characters. There's a lot of suggestive dancing that, if women were involved instead, would feel sexist. That's an interesting twist, although it still seems to say that a woman needs a man.

While all the performances are excellent, there are a few that stand out. Barbara Walsh's Brenda practically bleeds on stage, so we really feel the character's pain. Sara Chase is impressive as the three mistresses, giving each a definable difference that goes beyond her three wigs and quick changes. And Sam Harris is a total delight as Duane. He pours his whole self into the performance and makes the audience want to sing along.

But the real stars of the show are the production elements. Peter J. Davidson's set is gorgeous and functional at the same time. Dark chevron walls that expand and collapse like the iris of a camera give several scenes the feel of a film. Illuminated panels move around and change color to create many varied scenes so well, that the large stage feels visually full at all times.

Paul Tazewell's costumes seem only clever until Brenda comes out in a large man's shirt and we see that characters can wear their grief. Mark McCullough's light is defining and equally emotional. Director Francesca Zambello gives the show a needed quick pacing and allows each character a real emotional arc.

Whoever thought that "First Wives Club" would make a good musical was right, but we'll have to wait a while before it becomes a Broadway-worthy show. ♦

Patricia Morris Buckley has been reviewing the arts in San Diego for 25 years.





Welton Jones

## San Diego Arts

### "The First Wives Club" at the Old Globe Theatre

*Payback can be brutal*

*By Welton Jones*

*Posted on Sat, Aug 1st, 2009*

*Last updated Sat, Aug 1st, 2009*

The best hope for "The First Wives Club," a new musical comedy now premiering at the Old Globe Theatre, is that enough divorces make enough ex-wives wealthy enough to enjoy a night out at the theatre, maybe with some chums in the same boat.

This is a play about nice, decent, even noble starter wives and the dastardly weasels they wed, back when they all were poor. Reunited by the suicide of their old college roommate, three such victims vow to find their revenge by ruining their exes.

How they do this is one of the drags on this show. Rupert Holmes, who writes all kinds of stuff including film scores, loves a mystery. (He writes them, too.) His 1985 musical "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" allowed the audience to vote on whodunit while the cast stood ready with multiple endings.

The mystery on this occasion is how exactly this rococo plot DOES produce its result. A chart would be helpful to those who really care. Others may take the alternative of just enjoying the verbal barbs (examples shortly) and the comfortable old-growth pop songs by Holland-Dozier-Holland (brothers Brian and Eddie plus Lamont D.), who apparently haven't been up to much since they wrote all those massive 1960s hits for the Supremes and the Four Tops.

Despite some really slick production values and a generally tight and perky staging by Francesca Zambello, this is still just another one of those six-finales-in-search-of-a-plot shows.

With three wives, three husbands and three home wreckers, there are lots of featured players needing featured turns. The tootsie problem is solved by having one protean actress – the tireless Sara Chase – play all three, thanks to the wizardry of the wig people. But they've added a lesbian daughter and a gay pal. So there's always about to be a big number.

Some of these, naturally, work better than others. Anything involving Sam Harris, as the gay pal who sings "I know you're lonely, I wish I could clone me...", seems upbeat, energetic and fun. A sex-romp for the three husbands and Ms. Chase (quick-changing skillfully behind the bed) clears the sinuses. And a sextet for the three couples – "One Sweet Moment" – is both a respite from the endless cynicism and a wistful swatch of real romanticism.

The three wives are each played by actresses of true Broadway distinction and they blend well as Sarah Lawrence grads 23 years on, despite the ragged edges of the characters. Sheryl Lee Ralph is the one who became the big recording star, Karen Ziemba is the "recovering timid person" who gave up her career for hubby and Barbara Walsh is the Jewish-Italian lowbrow with a foot in each stereotypes. Each gets a solo turn or two but they stick in memory for the ensembles.



## First Wives Club the Musical

August 01, 2009 by [Deirdre McGill](#)

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Now if you've seen the movie of this same title (Where three "40+" women plot revenge on their affluent spouses who traded them in for younger gals) resist the temptation to yawn and roll your eyes. This musical goes to unexpected places and uses the stage as a medium to manufacture a zany "camp" reality where sponsors still film

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outrageous 30 second television spots and gay [fashion](#) designers still rule the world. Once you enter this time warp which hearkens to a simpler past when Americans could still afford sparkly designer dresses and psycho-therapy sessions were all the rage : You are ready to be mightily entertained by a great team of professionals.

Act One sets up the situation introducing the first three wronged "wives": Annie ( Karen Ziemba), Elysa ( Sheryl Lee Ralph) , and Brenda ( Barbara Walsh) in a montage of their past lives. However Act Two storms in like a locomotive, with a rollicking revenge scheme in the satisfyingly climatic moments that drives us all to applaud these ladies final liberation from their ridiculous husbands in a joyride of unmitigated screwball insanity.

The always fresh and unpredictable "Pina Colada Song" 70's pop star , author and scribe, Renaissance man Rupert Holmes (His Broadways hits include the 2007 Tony award winning " Curtains!", George Burns comedy " Good Night Gracie", as well as Charles Dickens The Mystery of Edwin Drood ") serves up a script which alternates between one

line quips like " I'd hug you but my throng just broke" to quietly dignified conversation between two consenting adults who have fallen out of love.

Of course, Holmes witticisms are supported by the legendary songwriting team of the Holland brothers ( Eddie and Brian) and Lamont Dozier who set the charts on fire with dozens of classic hits such as "'Where Did Our Love Go" and " Baby I need Your Loving" to name a few back in the 1960's when some of the best" sing a long" music was written.

In this spirited production , The incredibly versatile supporting cast almost walks off with the show in some silly moments of camp parody. Sara Chase ( Leslie, Shelley, Feebee) is both devastatingly funny as well as a powerhouse vocalist in the assorted second wives roles. One wonders how she manages the many costume changes in time for each entrance, and Brad Oscar is riotously funny as Barbara's sleazy husband Morty in a " Crazy Eddie" type commercial with Chase co-starring as his ditsy new wife. Sam Harris completes the triangle as Duane the gay designer and appears well at ease in the show.

However, the three leading actresses are [Broadway](#) veterans who jettison back just in time to dominate their co-leads in Act 2 's series of Donna Summer 's inspired " power ballads" which culminate in the **Dream Girl's** potential showstopper by Sheryl Lee Ralph as the Diva past her prime. The ten man orchestra does a very credible job doubling on instruments led by conductor John Gentry Tennyson , but a [Broadway](#) house orchestra might have the resources to make the crowd roar even louder than opening night's standing ovation which proved that " Yes, we really liked them, and yes the songs were really beginning to gel with the characters."

Mark McCullough's lighting [design](#) although capable was slightly uninteresting and I felt Zane Mark did not give the first wives--- who are all credible dancers---- enough to do in Act One. I was waiting for the big breakout dance number for the girls and it just never seemed to happen until late in Act Two which was also slightly rushed and not passionately staged enough to satisfy hardcore musical theater fans wanting the girls to really enjoy a rebirth in their new souls.

Award winning director Francesca Zambello ( "The Little Mermaid" " West Side Story") might be another good reason to see the show and she does a suitable job navigating the moods of the many different "wives " here. Ziemba and Walsh still seem a little tentative in pivotal comic moments--- but they could take always take tips from fellow wife Ralph. As the "Aging Diva" Ralph has definitely found all her comic beats--- even inventing a few ones when she clicks her [boots](#) in displeasure during an encounter with her younger Diva replacement wife.

All in all this is a first class demonstration of an immensely enjoyable show where time just zips by and breathes new life into what could have been a hackneyed premise in lesser hands . These folks all know their [Broadway](#) hits and they deliver. And just like that old saying about mature females:This creative team is as good as fine wine.

So if I were you I would immediately boogie on down to see this potential 2010 [Broadway](#) "baby "before it moves

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# L.A. Review: 'The First Wives Club'

## at the Old Globe Theatre

Reviewed by Les Spindle

AUGUST 03, 2009



PHOTO CREDIT

Craig Schwartz

Holmes; pop score by Motown tunesmiths Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland) proves that crassness has no limits. As if Holmes' crushingly unimaginative regurgitation of the film script wasn't enough, tedious songs further sabotage the enterprise.

Formulaic to the hilt, this version offers ciphers in place of characters and sloppily related plot points rather than narrative fluidity. The arbitrarily inserted songs don't illuminate the story or characters. There are at least a half dozen "I am woman, hear me roar" ballads that are hard to tell apart, two or three up-tempo showstopper wannabes, and a handful of other superfluous numbers. The songwriters enjoyed chart-topping triumphs in the 1960s, writing for the likes of the Supremes, but they seem oblivious to the craft of fashioning book-musical

Less than a year after the debut of Dolly Parton's "9 to 5: The Musical," here's another pre-Broadway tuner based on a film comedy from yesteryear about fed-up women scheming to wreak revenge upon chauvinist-pig men. The menopausal chick flick "The First Wives Club" (1996), based on the novel by Olivia Goldsmith, primarily demonstrated that mediocrity needn't preclude box-office success, particularly when such stars as Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn, and Diane Keaton lend their cachet. This latest recycling (book by Rupert

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songs, and apparently no one involved was able to provide guidance.

Seasoned performers make futile attempts to energize the proceedings. As the crusading wives, Karen Ziemba, Sheryl Lee Ralph, and Barbara Walsh give everything they have to Lisa Stevens' trite choreography and the colorless songs, to little avail. Playing the louts who left the wives for younger women, John Dossett and Kevyn Morrow huff and puff their way through misfired gags, while Brad Oscar generates modest laughs in a zany commercial-filming sequence. Sara Chase's portrayals of all three "other women" never advance beyond clichés. As a flamboyant designer, the usually terrific Sam Harris is stuck playing a one-note fag stereotype.

Even the design elements lack inspiration; this is a surprisingly bland-looking Broadway-bound confection. Think of director Francesca Zambello's world-premiere rendition as the "Stepford Wives" of women-empowerment musicals: Watch it jerk and sputter as its misaligned ingredients short-circuit.

*Presented by and at the Old Globe Theatre, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park, San Diego. July 31-Aug. 30. Tue.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Thu.-Fri., 8 p.m.; Sat., 2 and 8 p.m.; Sun., 2 and 7 p.m.*

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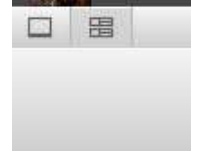
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## Old Globe's First Wives Club is Broadway Bound

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by Don Grigware



From film to musical stage: though hardly original, it seems to be the steadiest solution to filling the large theaters of The Great White Way. 10 years ago [The Old Globe](#) hosted the musicalization of *The Full Monty*, which translated quite

appealingly to the stage...and now so does the new effort from [Rupert Holmes](#) and Holland, Dozier, Holland: *The First Wives Club*, so popular with movie audiences in 1996. There's something about a good movie script: when it's that good (this one by [Robert Harling](#)), the storytelling will translate well to just about any medium. *Wives Club*'s a mix of comedy and drama, high on sex appeal, laughs ...and even has its little message of substance, with people trying to make a difference in their lives. Look how the factory boys of *The Full Monty* made a drastic change in their work habits and what fun they had; well, the gals of *The First Wives Club* will strut their stuff, championing their cause for equality and independence and win just as many hearts along the way.



Audiences relate well to middle-class crises. If men lose their jobs, we feel sympathy; if husbands dump their wives for younger women, we turn our attention deservedly to the mature women. So when Brenda ([Barbara Walsh](#)), Annie ([Karen Ziemba](#)) and Elyse ([Sheryl Lee Ralph](#)) unite against their husbands to get back their dignity and pride, we really don't care if they fight fire with fire and cheat, connive and deceive them - this is revenge, baby! The ladies are all top-notch and belt out their numbers with the best of them: Walsh ("My Heart Wants To Try One More Time"), Ziemba ("Have Your Way with Me") and Ralph ("That Was Me Then, This Is Me Now"). The pop rock score by H-D-H is fun and uplifting. There's no tune here of the calibre of their past hits like "Baby Love" or "Baby I Need Your Loving". You don't leave the theatre humming the tunes, but they all work well within the context of the play, moving the plot forward and adding distinctive feelings. The auction number ("Payback the Bitch!") is a delight, with special nod to choreographer [Lisa Stevens](#) for some of the brightest and snappiest moments in the show.

The supporting cast are all dyn-o-mite. [Sam Harris](#) is a flambuoyant stand out as designer Duane; [Brad Oscar](#) is a mensch as the straying Morty; [John Dossett](#) is stunning (especially in leather - see the top photo!) and [Kevyn Morrow](#), with his hightoned body and superior ego to match, rounds out the distasteful *entry-level* hubbie trio to perfection. [Sara Chase](#) is sheer delight in three roles, especially notable as the dumb Shelley and a vocal knockout as Feebee.

[Peter J. Davison](#)'s scenic design with its glass panels and New York skyline is a stunner, as are [Mark McCullough](#)'s lighting design and [Paul Tazewell](#)'s dazzling costumes, notably those flashy furs and leopard outfit for Ralph and the *all-white* finale. Zambello's fast-paced direction keeps the action on course without ever missing a beat.

This is a very entertaining evening of theatre. Very **slick** in production values, *Wives Club*'s engrossing story of characters that change from superficial to caring, adapted here by [Rupert Holmes](#), meaningful score by H-D-H and gleaming performances from the entire ensemble make it a must-see. You will "Jump for Joy"! Go, go, go!!!

The First Wives Club a new musical  
book by [Rupert Holmes](#); music & lyrics by  
[Brian Holland](#), [Lamont Dozier](#), [Eddie Holland](#)

# SAN DIEGO CITY BEAT

August 5, 2009

## THEATER

### Staying power

MOTOWN GIANTS DRIVE  
EVERYTHING GOOD ABOUT  
GLOBE'S *FIRST WIVES CLUB*

BY MARTIN JONES WESTLIN

The tunes for The Old Globe Theatre's *The First Wives Club*, a New Musical were written by Lamont Dozier and Brian and Eddie Holland, the songwriting-producing team from Motown's Golden Age (the 1960s). Martha and the Vandellas' "Nowhere to Run" is among the trio's 6 million serious hits. And since "Nowhere to Run" has just passed Gustav Mahler's *Resurrection* symphony as the coolest song in the history of the universe, you figure this world-premiere entry is worth a look. The guys are Detroit's Lennon-McCartney counterparts in the definitive 20th-century music explosion—but do they have the chops more than 40 years later, and in a theater setting?

They do. In fact, there's an awful lot to like about this movie-turned-Broadway-bound play, whose slow start gives way to a strong statement about wandering husbands and their just deserts. The dialogue needs some revamp; I counted 27 instances in Rupert Holmes' book that don't distinguish the characters or the show, and I stopped there because that's all I had time to jot down. But the players, especially funny Sam Harris as a clotheshorse who becomes an interior decorator, have their assignments under their belts, and the storyline serves as more than a bridge between the tunes. This is a smart, hip tale colored with seamless music and a few high-stakes twists in which the women deservedly wear the pants.

It's only too bad the ball has to get rolling with Cynthia Swann's suicide. Her husband cultivated a roving eye, same as the mates of the story's three surviving principals; the old school chums find themselves in a fight when the men's adultery seeps into the gals' psyches and careers. The women eventually have their way amid a plan to honor Cynthia's memory—those scenes are beautifully written, especially the ones



Elyse and Annie (Sheryl Lee Ralph and Karen Ziemba, left and right, on pedestal) just wanna have fun.

involving Elyse Elliott (Sheryl Lee Ralph). Elyse, an R&B vocalist, has the most to lose in her battle with husband-manager Bill (Kevyn Morrow). Watch as he takes it on the chin amid Elyse's finesse—the chemistry is as letter-perfect as the actors' timing.

The gals open a women's center in Cynthia's name, which is great—but they never say what it's for. "Women's center" conjures far more complex issues than those connected with adultery, and we need more specifics to clarify the girls' efforts. But don't let this anticlimax mess with ya. Francesca Zambello directs a full-throated cast, with the legendary Dozier-Holland trio leading the way. They oughta release "Payback's a Bitch" as a single. **CB**

*This review is based on the evening production of Aug. 2. The First Wives Club, a New Musical runs through Aug. 30 at The Old Globe Theatre mainstage, 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. \$55-\$81. [www.oldglobe.org](http://www.oldglobe.org).*

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### Just A Stage

Theater Previews By Neil Cohen

#### New Wives Tale

The First Wives Club is as fun as a bachelorette party

In the interest of fairness, I must admit that I was waylaid on the way to seeing the First Wives Club by what can only be described as the “crazy woman valet freakout” which was followed by the San Diego Police overreaction, which made parking literally impossible. Once I did settle into my seat, I enjoyed watching new performers breathe life into the tale of three wives “of a certain age” who find themselves thrown over by their no-good spouses for younger models. With a script by Rupert Holmes and music and lyrics by the legendary HDH (Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland), the trio responsible for “Stop! In the Name of Love”, “You Can’t Hurry Love”, and “How Sweet It Is”, you know that the musical will be different than the 1996 LGBT film fave. Not surprisingly, Goldie Hawn’s aging actress Elyse is now an R & B diva played by the gorgeous powerhouse Sheryl Lee Ralph, who can really wrap her pipes around HDH’s slightly retro-sounding score. While Karen Ziemba is adorable as Annie (the Diane Keaton role), Barbara Walsh seems a little tame as Brenda, and not only because she’s filling a role identified with Bette Midler. The real star of the show, not counting gorgeous Kevyn Morrow’s abs (and silky voice), is Sara Chase, who is a revelation as not one, not two, but three homewreckin’ hussies! How one woman can play icy gold-digger Shelley (Sarah Jessica Parker’s role), vapid Britney wannabe Feebee (The sublimely ridiculous Elizabeth Berkley), and unbridled sexologist Dr. Leslie Rosen (Marcia Gay Harden) is one of the true joys I’ve seen in the theater. I literally didn’t realize Chase played all three roles, until her comic clowning elicited identical applause at all three characters’ exits. With The First Wives Club a shoo-in for Broadway, Chase (Now seen in Comedy Central’s Michael and Michael Have Issues) could earn an easy Tony nod.



The show introduces us to three college friends, now middle-aged married women supporting men who are not worthy of them. Their fourth friend, Cynthia, was a society wife who commits suicide at the open of the show after her husband leaves her. As each woman proclaims that will never happen to them, they of course have to admit that it has. Brenda’s husband Morty, a Crazy Eddie type appliance huckster warmly played by Producers vet Brad Oscar, dumps her for a money-hungry model. Annie’s husband, she discovers, has been seeing their therapist, a confirmed hedonist, on a bed rather than a couch. Elyse is a music legend who’s let her husband control her career, finances, and self-respect. Later in the show, Ralph blows the roof off the Old Globe when she proclaims that “That was me then, this is me now”. That kind of reinvention in the face of adversity is the message of the show, and the three leads do a wonderful job engaging the audience and making us root for their success. Walsh is given some ballads that show that she really loves the lug who done her wrong, and she sells them as well as she did when I saw her as the mother in Big: The Musical years ago. Ziemba, to my mind, is the heart of the show. She is such a generous personality, that she makes Annie a fully rounded character, which is not easy to do in a plot-heavy musical. She also plays a great PFLAG mother to her lesbian daughter. Morrow and Dossett are great in their roles, especially the slimy but suave Morrow. The music and book move the action at a good pace, and scenes like Morty’s Super Bowl commercial are hilarious. Overall, you’ll find the First Wives Club an empowering night at the theater, full of an amazing array of Broadway caliber talent. It is easy to imagine that with some tightening and a bigger, more focused finale, The First Wives Club will do well when it hits Broadway.

The First Wives Club  
Through August 30, 2009  
The Old Globe Theatre  
1363 Old Globe Way (Balboa Park)  
San Diego, CA  
Tickets: \$66.00-92.00

#### Fly me to the Moon!

Catch Me If You Can’s a space age spectacular





Seattle is the best place to go to see fantastic shows before they blast off for Broadway, and *Catch Me If You Can* is the 5th Avenue Theatre's latest hit.

Based on the 2002 Steven Spielberg film that chronicled the amazing larcenous life of teenager Frank Abagnale Jr., who convinced people he was a Pan-Am pilot, a pediatrics doctor and a Louisiana lawyer, *Catch Me If You Can* is a retro-smooth musical cocktail that defines "cool."

Hairspray composers Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman's incredibly witty and lush score mixes perfectly with iconic playwright Terrence McNally's book to hit all the film's high points, especially in the first act.

Director Jack O'Brien and choreographer Jerry Mitchell bring their best talents to the production, giving it a glossy, fun-filled 1960's TV variety show feel that is the perfect way to make the film sing and dance.

The production design is absolutely breathtaking, like stepping into a *Mad Men* episode as scored by The Rat Pack.

Aaron Tveit, recently voted Broadway's hottest man, is amazing as Frank Jr., all but erasing Leonardo DiCaprio's long shadow in the role. He sings like the best of the crooners and he has charisma enough to power David Rockwell's fantastic light show cum stage.

From the moment he takes over the stage with his backup dancers to sing "Live in Living Color!", you will not be able to take your eyes off him (unless he's making one of his many escapes from the FBI.)

Tony Winner Norbert Leo Butz, playing Tom Hanks' dogged agent Carl Hanratty, creates a whole new musical hero, the super schlub, a man with no life who nonetheless commands the stage whenever he appears. Carl is determined to bring down the elusive Frank, until he discovers that he's only a kid. "Here I Am (To Save The Day)" is the perfect anthem for Carl's dull-but-thrilling way of life, and the mile-a-minute patter never trips up the wily Butz.

Tom Wopat, resisting the urge to Christopher Walkenize his Frank Abagnale Sr., takes the role of a man with big dreams and little success and makes him heartbreaking. He sends Frank Jr. off to a life of crime with the tender "Fifty Checks", a father-son bonding moment marred by the fact that he's telling his son to spend until the checks run out, a lesson too many people have followed these days.

Frank Sr. and his wife Paula (the gorgeous and glamorous Rachel De Benedet) do the unthinkable and divorce, sending their son's perfect life crashing down and driving him to run away in search of "Someone Else's Skin" he can inhabit.

Frank's first miracle job snatch is also the show's most fun. He becomes a Pan-Am pilot smothered in swingin' stewardesses, leading to the fabulous production number "The Jet Set". Every time Hanratty gets close, Frank escapes, racking up 2.8 million dollars in rubber checks along the way.

As act two opens, Frank has graduated to playing doctor, literally, among as he puts it, a bunch of horny nurses. There he meets Brenda, a sweet candy stripper played by Broadway belle Kerry Butler. The show drags at this point, if only because nothing involving Brenda's N'Awlin's family (Nick Wyman and Linda Hart) is half as entertaining as Frank's high-flying Pan-Am adventures were.

The drama of Carl discovering Frank's broken childhood and becoming a pseudo father figure, as well as Frank Sr.'s sad downward spiral, have an emotional heft that is truly moving. However, if tweaks can be made pre-Broadway, I would rewrite the entire Strong family outing part, including the odd number "Bury Me Beside the One I Love" and give Hart, Butler and Wyman something more fun (for the audience) to do.

Butler gets the "Eleven O'Clock number", a soaring ballad called "Fly, Fly Away", but because her part is under-developed, it packs no punch.

Still, *Catch Me If You Can* is a "Strange but True" tale that has become pure magic on the Seattle stage.

I hope you'll catch it, either there or during its sure-to-be triumphant Broadway run. The handsome Tveit may not sing "Come Fly with Me" but you'll definitely want to fly his friendly skies as he becomes a huge Broadway star.

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## The Old Globe Becomes The First Wives' Clubhouse

By Cynthia Citron

Have you noticed that southern California has become the new Boston? It used to be that Boston was the place where new plays opened before moving on in triumph to Broadway. Or not. Now it seems that new plays---or at least new musicals---most often begin their runs here on the left coast. Take, for example, the pizzazzy, high-energy musical based on Olivia Goldsmith's successful book "The First Wives Club" that opened this week at San Diego's prestigious Old Globe Theater.



Barbara Walsh - Sheryl Lee Ralph - Karen Ziemba

The musical has impeccable credentials. Adapted from Paul Rudnick's 1996 screenplay for the movie of the same name, the musical was written by the much-acclaimed Rupert Holmes ("Curtains," "The Mystery of Edwin Drood"), with music and lyrics by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland, who wrote 1960s Motown hits for The Supremes, The Four Tops, and Marvin Gaye, among others. The main problem is, however, that this musical is too much of a good thing. Even Rudnick himself felt that the final screenplay was "incomprehensible" and, as he commented to the New York Times, "To figure out the structure of that movie would require an undiscovered Rosetta Stone." And, unfortunately, Holmes' script follows Rudnick's screenplay to the letter, and there is no Rosetta Stone in sight.

For one thing, the story of four erstwhile college roommates whose husbands dump them for younger women could be told more effectively in two hours, rather than three. And while the funeral of one of them provides a motive for their reuniting, and for the actions that follow, the fourth dumpee is really an extraneous character and could easily be dumped from the production altogether.

Further, the three women are so busy singing (some songs are fine, but many are lamentably ordinary), or kvetching (see Karen Ziemba as the terminally timid Annie), that you never get to KNOW them, much less care for or empathize with them. They spend so much time feeling sorry

for themselves, so much time before getting angry, and so much time seeking “empowerment” and change, that the first act ends before they get to the crux of the plot: revenge. So by intermission you still have no idea where they’re going.

The second act begins with more of the same: the men cavorting with their new women, the wives gamely (and lamely) attempting to live it up at a nightclub. It isn’t until the middle of the second act that the women embark on their convoluted acts of revenge. And the plans proceed with such intemperate speed that you really do need a Rosetta Stone to keep track of what’s going on. It feels as though the revenge motif, instead of being the culmination of the plot, was thrown in almost as an afterthought. (“We’ve got to go SOMEWHERE with this script...”)

If writer Holmes and director Francesca Zambello decide to rework this production, several of the actors should definitely go to Broadway with the show. Sheryl Lee Ralph, who plays Elyse, a beginning-to-fade singer, is a rock ‘em, sock ‘em songstress who carries much of the show. Barbara Walsh, who plays Brenda, the Sicilian/Jewish housewife whose husband brings his inappropriately dressed floozy to his son’s bar mitzvah, is also a spirited member of the Club. Sara Chase, who plays all three floozies (with different wigs and costumes), accomplishes what it took Sarah Jessica Parker, Marcia Gay Harden, and Elizabeth Berkley to do in the movie. And Sam Harris as a flamboyant interior decorator who figures in one of the revenge plots, appropriately chews up the scenery as well as the furniture.

There are some really wonderful numbers in the show as well. The opening number, in which the four roommates graduate from college and embark hopefully on their marriages, gets the musical off to a rousing start. Another number, where the husbands fade slowly into the background as the wives come into their own, is beautiful, melancholy, and moving, while Elyse’s solo, “That Was Me Then, This Is Me Now,” is a powerful anthem to the process of change. And a scene at an auction house is cleverly staged and lots of fun.

Of course, where there’s music, there’s dancing. In this case, lots of it. Choreographer Lisa Stevens has provided some lively dances, but not much of it is very inventive. What this show really needs is a Bob Fosse/Michael Bennett kind of choreographer, but unfortunately, guys like that don’t come along very often.

Scenic designer Peter J. Davison has done well with a fairly static set. Its backdrop of screens opens to reveal the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building in various lights and moods, and in several cameos the staging is set off-center in an effective diamond shape. He is aided in this by Mark McCullough’s ever-changing lighting design. And Paul Tazewell dresses the cast in outfits that successfully illustrate their personalities.

In trying to cut this potentially exciting show down to a sittable two hours, there are several characters that are unnecessary, even though they were present in the movie version. For example, does Annie really need a lesbian daughter who adds very little to the plot? And does Brenda really need a Mafia Uncle Carmine? And certainly the long, boring song and dance in the glitzy dress shop could be cut without leaving a sequin behind.

All in all, however, despite my reservations about this production, a musical of "The First Wives Club" is a marvelous idea, and with a little editing and beefing up it should be a major hit in New York. As it already is in San Diego, with the Old Globe Theater sold out for the entire run, including its current extension to August 30m 2009.

Comments? Write to us at: [Letters@ReviewPlays.Com](mailto:Letters@ReviewPlays.Com)

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## **My Review of The First Wives Club (very long with a disclaimer)**

**Posted by: GabbyGerard** 07:22 am EDT 07/31/09

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I've been resisting the temptation to post my thoughts on The First Wives Club here for a couple of different reasons. First of all, I saw a preview of the show last week and it wasn't yet frozen. In fact, it was the first performance where an entirely new song was integrated into the show for one of the main characters. I generally think it's unfair to "publish" reviews of any preview performance, especially one of an entirely: as the success of Next to Normal's current incarnation proves, work should be allowed time to develop. Second of all, I have a couple of friends peripherally involved in the production. Though, in this instance, I certainly think I'm clear-headed enough not to grow biased because of my personal relationships, I did not want my comments dismissed as "shilling" or my own personal credibility called into question on a board I love to visit.

With these major disclaimers in place, I now feel compelled to post my opinions of First Wives Club because so many people have been tearing the show apart without having even seen it. I understand the questions that Zambello's previous work and the composing team's lack of experience have raised--but they should remain QUESTIONS and not morph into declarative statements...at least until you've actually seen the play under discussion. The fact that so many people feel entirely comfortable making a judgement call on an entire production from an online promotional video is incredibly discouraging to me. It strikes me as reviewing a book after reading its back cover or deconstructing a movie after seeing its trailer.

Based on the preview I saw of The First Wives' Club last week, I think the show has great potential. It doesn't aim to be Sondheim or Pinter--nor should it. Different plays serve different purposes and this aims to be fun, escapist, musical comedy with sweet, inspirational undertones. On these terms, it's fairly successful and, in its weakest moments, still promising.

The adapters have chosen to set the piece in the present rather than the year its film was released. While FWC is not as obvious of a period-piece as 9 to 5, the contemporary setting still triggered some hiccups for me. Would women who graduated from college in 1986 be as ashamed of divorce or as fixated on the concept of the nuclear family as women who graduated from college in the late sixties? My first instinct was to say no--but then I thought of all the bitter divorces we still read about in the papers and the angry exes I myself know and, when taken-out of the politically correct abstract and into the personal, I thought I might be viewing the piece with too limited of a perspective. I'm still undecided as to whether or not the contemporary setting works--after all, should you really be thinking of the year as you watch a show?--and I'm guessing it will be a hot topic in the press' response the show.

Apart from its time period, the major problem with the piece lies in its structure. It's not until the act one closer that the show really starts to gain momentum. Until that point, both the book and the score luxuriate in too much exposition. The pace of Rupert Holmes' book (which--in this section--doesn't feel as funny as it should be) and the sheer number of HDH songs (which expand on some moment that aren't necessarily intense enough to merit musicalization) make the stakes feel surprisingly low. After intermission, the show takes off and really crackles. The libretto starts moving a lot faster without ever feeling too plot

packed (ie, *The Color Purple*). Here Holmes does some of the best comic writing of his career: his work is laugh-out-loud funny without ever feeling forced or sitcom-y. The changes he makes to his source material are theatrical and work so well that I didn't miss aspects of the movie I assumed I would (ie, Maggie Smith's character)...and if it was his decision to combine the roles of the mistresses/second wives into one track, he is to be celebrated: doing so creates some of the juiciest comic business I've encountered since first seeing *The Producers*.

HDH's score has a similar "promising work-in-progress" feel. As noted above, there are a few too many songs and many of the ones that feel like surplus sound a little too much alike. The lyrics occasionally fall prey to the dangers of musical theatre pop "anthems" but they are be highly commended for incorporating elements of the style that made them famous without losing a sense of the genre for which they're actually writing. Despite a questionable opening number (more on that later), the good songs outnumber the bad and several are absolutely delightful. Particularly noteworthy are "Change In My Life" (the act one closer that gives the show the kick in the pants it needs), "Man Like Me," "Jump for Joy," "Have Your Way With Me," a beautifully sad sextet for the couples in the second act and the hilarious, show-stopping "Payback's a Bitch." For the most part, this is a musical theatre pop score whose playability on your iPod doesn't take away from its relevance or efficiency in context.

Zambello may not be the ideal director for this piece--comedy doesn't strike me as her strong suit--but she acquits herself surprisingly well, especially after the Mermaid debacle. I don't want to beat a dead horse but she could certainly afford to get things moving better in the first act. Nevertheless, she shows a general lightness of hand and straight-forwardness here that she obviously lacked in *Little Mermaid* and again, as the piece goes on, genuine comic panache. The only major reservation she inspired me concerns the tone of the opening sequence. Holmes and HDH have effectively streamlined a lot of exposition into their first combined song and scene but the death of Cynthia feels problematic--in part from the generic "Defying Gravity"-esque lyrics they give her and in part because of the way Zambello stages the scene. Stockard Channing infused the film's dark opening with haunting pathos. Her pain is so palpable and her promise is so great that you can understand how losing her would jar the title characters into new phases of their lives. Though her scenic designer furnishes her with a fantastic optical illusion, Zambello stages the suicide in such a way that you can't quite tell if it's the intentional decision of a tortured woman or a slapstick accident by a sloppy drunk (it did indeed get a few laughs at the performance I attended). In fact, Zambello's general treatment of the Cynthia character feels more Megan Mullally as Karen Walker than Stockard Channing. Treating a death, especially one of such dramatic importance, with such lightness casts the wrong kind of darkness over the show's first quarter. Lisa Stevens choreography is underwhelming but never bad. With some of the music and the cast members she's been given, though, it feels a shame that she hasn't crafted more virtuosic showstoppers.

The cast works as a marvelous unit and creates far more of an ensemble piece than the celebrity-driven source material would suggest. Sara Chase takes on the aforementioned mistress track and milks it for all it's worth...which is quite a lot. She steals every scene she's in without ever stepping on her co-stars' toes. The audience responded to her with highly deserved, voracious enthusiasm. Sam Harris' characterization of the gay designer may simply be a variation on a theme we've seen him play before but he plays it sublimely. The fun he has is infectious. I've always been a fan of John Dossett's but here he is especially good, cutting loose comically in ways I haven't previously seen him have the opportunity to do and fully embracing the greasiness of his character when he must. Brad Oscar endows his character with such sincerity and heart that he's able to make his character's last minute change of heart believable in ways when the movie and book did not. Kevyn Morrow has the most thankless material of the husband's and doesn't always rise above it--but he does provide a slice of beefcake that the audience enthusiastically welcomed.

Now, of course, we come to the first wives themselves. If I didn't know from the headlines that Sheryl Lee Ralph was a last minute replacement, I'd think the role was written for her. She is a glamorous and glorious Elyse who has the audience eating out of her hand. Though both she and the writers could afford Elise the opportunities to be a bit more damaged at the beginning of the story--thus giving her even further to go by the end--Ralph gets every laugh she's supposed to get and brings thrilling commitment to her stirring 11 o'clock number. Karen Ziemba is alternately adorable and heart-breaking as Annie. Her lovely singing and acting match the standard of excellence we associate with her dancing. If Ralph succeeds because she is so different from Goldie Hawn and Ziemba succeeds because she is so sincerely and effectively invokes the soul of Diane Keaton, Barbara Walsh flounders because she is somewhere in between. Her performance isn't a disaster but the shlubby angst of her character doesn't come to her naturally. At times, she seems to be working rather hard for a "Bette Midler type" characterization and at other times seems to be running as far as she can from one. Whether it's simply because of the character archetype or because of the fond memories people have of Midler's performance, the audience still responded well to her but, when push comes to shove, I think Walsh (who--it should be said--is in titillatingly wonderful voice) is a victim of miscasting...and she was, indeed, the only principal whose film counterpart was being discussed frequently as the crowd vacated the theater. She works well enough with her co-stars that I don't think it would be a travesty if she continues on with the show in whatever after-life it gets but I don't think she is on their level. If the show does find its way to New York, I would love to see Ralph and Ziemba continue with it and maybe Ana Gasteyer (who played Brenda in several of the readings) find her way back into the triptych. Jan Maxwell would also be fun, though I don't know if she could sing it. Alix Korey and Jana Robbins may both now read a bit too old but I could also imagine them doing a lot with the role.

The Old Globe audience loved the show. The middle-aged women in the house--who might be the show's target audience?--were especially vocal in their appreciation. People laughed a lot, clapped in support of some of the more dramatic moments (a break-up here, a reunion there, etc.) and were asking when a CD would be available.

My bottom line is this: The First Wives' Club is in its out-of-town tryout phase and, for this stage, it's in fantastic shape. By no means is it ready to start previews on Broadway tomorrow but the potential is exhibits is exciting. I would hate for contempt for its source material or its creators to take the wind out of this ship's sails before people even see how well it rides the theatrical waters. Any damning statement vultures make about it without having seen it is more a comment on them than the promise of the piece itself.

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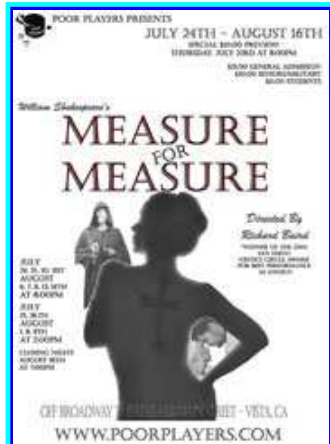
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**Previous:** [re: MUSICALS Starring a Male Star & Female Star](#) - **BobG** 09:25 am EDT 07/31/09

**Next:** [I agree. Nice job on the review.](#) - **attheflash** 04:36 pm EDT 08/01/09

**Thread:**

- [I agree. Nice job on the review.](#) - **attheflash** 04:36 pm EDT 08/01/09
- [If Walsh were to be replaced...](#) - **footlight9** 06:42 pm EDT 07/31/09 (4)
  - [Wow. I love that idea! \\*nmi\\*](#) - **MeredithChandler1973** 10:25 pm EDT 07/31/09 (3)
    - [Perfection. I would even go...](#) - **Pgenre** 02:34 am EDT 08/01/09 (2)
      - [re: Perfection. I would even go...](#) - **natatlielovesthtr** 04:38 pm EDT 08/02/09
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It must be said that the near capacity audience had a great time and affords performers a ubiquitous San Diego standing ovation. *The First Wives Club* is what passes for a Broadway musical these days. If it's going to Broadway it's good. So let's stand up. It's just that there's no *there* there.



**THE PERFORMERS** could be better. All are excellent singers, but just wishes they'd been given characters to inhabit. There's not enough room to get characters or a feasible plot, a new thread in the posh life of a famous pop singer. The 20 songs into two and a half hours. There are several standout songs: "Have Your Way With Me," "I Want to Try One More Time," "Jump for Joy," for instance. The ensemble is versatile, adaptable to the plot requirements.

and attendant costume changes. Barbara Walsh, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Karen Ziemba in *The First Wives Club* Schwartz

**THE PRODUCTION** features dazzling scenic design (moving translucent panels, staircase, and immense diaphanous draperies) by Peter J. Davison; marvelous outrageous costumes by Paul Tazewell (I could eat Ziemba's lavender pants); lighting by Mark McCullough; and sound (loud, mostly) by Jon Weston. Lisa S. is the choreographer. John Gentry Tennyson conducts nine-member orchestra. Renowned opera director Francesca Zambello directs. One wonders at this chaotic what is needed is more than a bit of show biz pizzazz. Music and Lyrics are by a 70something trio Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, whose songs lie mainly in the R&B style made familiar at Motown in the 1960s (think Marvin Gaye, The Supremes and the Four Tops). The most specific sound in *First Wives Club* than Motown, is three bars suggestive of Klezmer in "Today He's a Man," from Jason's Bar Mitzvah.

Imagine what this musical could be with songs and musical staging that enhance women's characters and life situations. For instance, think of the funny little scene when Miss Dorothy and her love lapse into operetta songs during *Thoroughbred Millie*, and you get some idea what I'm driving at. Sadly, *The First Wives Club* is one flavor. New York has many.

**THE LOCATION** 7 pm Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 pm Thursdays-Saturdays and Sundays, extended through **August 30**, at the Old Globe, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park, \$55-\$92, [www.theoldglobe.org](http://www.theoldglobe.org) or (619) 231-0000

**BOTTOM LINE:** Worth a try

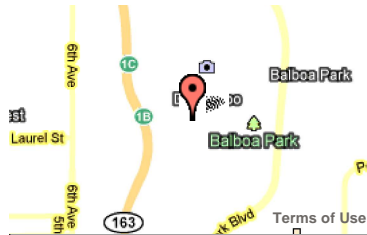


## Best Bets

**Poor Players** *Measure for Measure*, playing through **August 14** at 8 pm August 13-14, and at 7 pm Sunday, Aug. 14, at the 40-seat Off-Broadway Theatre, 131 Main St., Vista, \$10-\$15, [www.poorplayers.com](http://www.poorplayers.com) or phone (858) 643-9349.

## EVENTS

## The First Wives Club

*Balboa Park | Theater*TEXT SIZE: [A](#) | [A](#) | [A](#)[SEND TO A FRIEND](#) | [REMIND ME VIA E-MAIL](#)**Old Globe Theatre**

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Commercial fluff. The husbands are self-centered, manipulative jerks (why did the women marry these oafs in the first place?); the wives, gravely wronged but otherwise impeccable human beings, save for a soupçon of low self-esteem. They bond and devise a tripartite comeuppance, not only duping the dopes but getting rich along the way. The Old Globe's world-premiere musical is "Broadway bound," says the pub. And since Broadway embraces shallow remakes of movies set to music, it may find an audience. The songs, by the legendary Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland, who wrote some of the best music the Four Tops and Supremes ever sang, are always serviceable, and boffo when need be (and don't require the rabid overselling the production gives every note - every MOMENT, for that matter). The book, however, is a stumblethrough, nearly three hours long, with three conclusions before the conclusion, and some of the most narrowly drawn characters in memory. Peter J. Davison's fluid scenic designs, with Big Apple backdrops, are simple and stunning, while Lisa Stevens' bland choreography is been there, done that. Sam Harris and Sara Chase, in supporting roles, will be headliners soon. Leads Karen Ziemba, Barbara Walsh, and Sheryl Lee Ralph almost raise their characters to the level of sitcom. Almost.

**July 31 Through August 30****When:**

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### Community Theatre

Recently I had a crash and lost all of the community theatre info. I'm slowly getting it back. Please resend if you're not here

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[San Diego Jr. Theatre](#)  
[Such N' Such Productions](#)  
[Sunshine Brooks Theatre](#)

### OnStage Playhouse



Dickenson



better than nothing." Phantom plays through August 29.

Finally saw *The First Wives Club* directed by **Francesca Zambello** at the Old Globe. The house was full on the Thursday night I attended, and the audience very appreciative of the performances, however, for me, the production lacked cohesion and completeness. The first act kept my attention as the story (from the book by Rupert Holmes) of four attractive women unfolds from their college graduation to marriage and ultimately to divorce as each of the husbands cheat on their wives with younger women. Then one of the women jumps off a building to her death, and now there are three. The music and lyrics by **Holland, Dozier and Holland** is upbeat and catchy. Choreographer **Lisa Stevens** has created some peppy dance numbers, the costumes and sets are beautiful, but all these things do not a satisfying theatre evening make if the story doesn't ring true. In the second act, the redecorating scene and the auction at Sotheby's are gratuitous and unfulfilling. While the "suffering" women **Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziembe and Sheryl Lee Ralph** form an attractive trio of voices and movement, we never feel their pain, nor do they develop as real characters. Their husbands played by **John Dossett, Kevyn Morrow and Brad Oscar** don't have much characterization to work with which makes you wonder why the women would marry them in the first place. **Sam Harris** as Duane, and **Sara Chase**, who plays three roles, provide much of the humor but it's not enough to make this a fulfilling production, which runs through August 30.

## Theatre News

**Kristianne Kurner** of New Village Arts was at Herringbone's opening night, very excited about her upcoming turn with Moxie Theatre Company at La Jolla Playhouse as they take up residency for *Drink Me or The Strange Case of Alice Times Three* by **Mary Fengar Gall**.

And speaking of NVA, they will announce their new season on August 22 from 1-4pm, complete with snow cones and other goodies.

And while we're in the north, here's an announcement for Moonlight Theatre: **Jackie Cuccaro**, (recently of Twist at Diversiónary) who is a home-grown talent from NCRT's Theatre School and a graduate in theatre from SFSU, will direct *Seascape* on September 14 as part of WordsWork at the Avo Playhouse at 7:30pm

**Veronica Murphy, Walter Ritter, Amy Biedel, David Fenner, and Albert Dayan** (of Noises Off) will read Mark Twain on August 17 at 7pm at the Old Town Theatre.

Speaking of seasons, Lamb's Players has just announced theirs: J.B. Priestley's Intriguing *An Inspector Calls*, Norman Corwin's Riveting and Witty *The Rivalry*, Mary Chase's Classic Comedy *Harvey*, Jon Lorenz and Colleen Kollar Smith's World Premiere Musical *miX tape*, and the World Premiere of Dennis Hassell's *The Glory Man*. And we will see Leaving Iowa, which opens this week in Coronado.



San Diego based playwright **Matt Thompson** (left) has co-authored a short play entitled *Who's on Alpha?* that has just been published through Heuer Publishing. Set in the future the play centers around a starship captain (James T. Kirk) and his first officer (Mr. Spock) as the two have a dialogue about baseball. This 15 minute comedy short is a parody of the classic "Who's on First?" routine, made famous by Abbott and Costello.

**David McBean** has taken a deep breath and is ready to launch his 40 characters in a third rerun of *Fully Committed* to close out Cygnet's lease of the Rolando Theatre space. The production runs August 20 through September 13.

**Phil Johnson** will be joined by a talented cast of thousands at Casa Del Haha at Tango Del Rey on August 24 at 7:45pm for the very low price of \$10.



And that's it from me for another week. Love, Jenni

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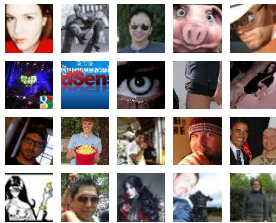




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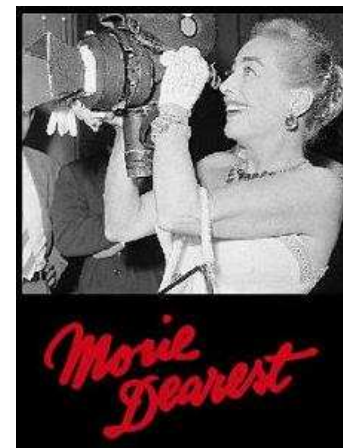
MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 2009

## Reel Thoughts: New Wives Tale



Once I settled into my seat at *The First Wives Club* (now playing through August 30 at San Diego's Old Globe), I enjoyed watching new performers breathe life into the tale of three wives "of a certain age" who find themselves thrown over by their no-good spouses for younger models. With a script by Rupert Holmes and music and lyrics by the legendary HDH (Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, the trio responsible for "Stop! In the Name of Love", "You Can't Hurry Love", and "How Sweet It Is"), you know that the musical will be different than the 1996 LGBT film fave.

Not surprisingly, Goldie Hawn's aging actress Elyse is played by the gorgeous powerhouse **Sheryl Lee Ralph**, who can really wrap her pipes around HDH's slightly retro-sounding score; while **Karen Ziemba** is adorable as Annie (the Diane Keaton role), **Barbara Walsh** seems a little tame as Brenda, and not only because she's filling a role identified with **Bette Midler**.

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The real star of the show, not counting gorgeous Kevyn Morrow's abs (and silky voice), is Sara Chase, who is a revelation as not one, not two, but all three homewreckin' hussies! How one woman can play icy gold-digger Shelley (Sarah Jessica Parker's role), vapid Britney wannabe Feebee (the sublimely ridiculous Elizabeth Berkley), and unbridled sexologist Dr. Leslie Rosen (Marcia Gay Harden) is one of the true joys I've seen in the theater. I literally didn't realize Chase played all three roles, until her comic clowning elicited identical applause at all three characters' exits. With *The First Wives Club* a shoo-in for Broadway, Chase (now seen in Comedy Central's *Michael and Michael Have Issues*) could earn an easy Tony nod.

The show introduces us to three college friends, now middle-aged married women supporting men who aren't worthy of them. Their fourth friend, Cynthia, was a society wife who commits suicide at the open of the show after her husband leaves her. As each woman proclaims that that will never happen to them, they of course have to admit that it has. Brenda's husband Morty, a "Crazy Eddie" type appliance huckster warmly played by *Producers* vet **Brad Oscar**, dumps her for a money-hungry model. Annie's husband (John Dossett), she discovers, has been seeing their therapist, a confirmed hedonist, on a bed rather than a couch. Elyse is a music legend who has let her husband control her career, finances, and self-respect.



Later in the show, Ralph blows the roof off the Old Globe when she proclaims, "That was her then, and this is her now". That kind of reinvention in the face of adversity is the message of the show,

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and the three leads do a wonderful job engaging the audience and making us root for their success. Walsh is given some ballads that show that she really loves the lug who done her wrong, and she sells them as well as she did when I saw her as the mother in *Big: The Musical* years ago. Ziemba, to my mind, is the heart of the show. She is such a generous personality, that she makes Annie a fully rounded character, which is not easy to do in a plot-heavy musical. She also plays a great PFLAG mother to her lesbian daughter. The music and book move the action at a good pace, and scenes like Morty's Super Bowl commercial are hilarious.

Overall, you'll find *The First Wives Club* an empowering night at the theater, full of an amazing array of Broadway caliber talent. It is easy to imagine that with some tightening and a bigger, more focused finale, *The First Wives Club* will do well when it hits Broadway.

Review by [Neil Cohen](#), resident film critic of *Movie Dearest* and Phoenix's *Echo Magazine*.

POSTED BY KIRBY - 8/03/2009 12:00:00 PM   
 LABELS: FROM SCREEN TO STAGE, MEN ON FILM, REEL THOUGHTS  
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## 1 COMMENTS - ADD OR READ:

Juliette. said...

Neat-- I didn't even know it had been turned into a musical. I can definitely see it, though...the film even had sort of a musical mentality about it. Glad you enjoyed it-- Sara Chase sounds marvelous.

AUGUST 3, 2009 12:56 PM

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"A sinister cabal of superior i

## Theatre Review (San Diego): *First Wives Club* at the Old Globe Theatre

Part of: [StageMAGE](#)

Author: [Robert Machray](#) — Published: Aug 20, 2009 at 6:51 am

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It is becoming a trend for Broadway producers to premiere new musicals in San Diego, at either the Old Globe Theatre (*Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*) or the La Jolla Playhouse (*Jersey Boys*). The Old Globe alone has been responsible for sending 20 productions on to Broadway.

The latest Broadway-bound offering is *The First Wives Club*, with a book by Rupert Holmes and music by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland, the trio who wrote music for the Supremes, Marvin Gaye, The Four Tops, and Martha and the Vandellas. Francesca Zambello directs and Lisa Stevens is the choreographer.

The story is, of course, based on the hit Hollywood movie by the same name and Oliver Goldsmith's bestselling novel. Four classmates get together in middle age only to find they share the same fate: their husbands are leaving them. This proves too much for one of the women (Victoria Matlock, in great singing voice), who decides to end it all. This spurs the "First Wives Club," as the remaining woman call themselves, to take matters into their own hands and exact revenge, with the help of a gay friend, Duane (Sam Harris).

The cast is loaded with stars: Karen Ziemba (*Contact*, *Steel Pier*, *Curtains*, *Never Gonna Dance*), Barbara Walsh (*Falsettos*, *Hairspray*, *Nine*), and Sheryl Lee Ralph (*Dreamgirls*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*). Yet even with all this talent the show fails to ignite. It reminded me of the short-lived *Nine To Five*, which had a lot of great moments but did not gel as a whole.

There are also problems with several other aspects of the show. When it is dramatic and plays to the performers' strengths it works best, but to have a dancer like Ziemba in the cast and not let her really dance seems criminal. I found Zambello's direction uninspired, though she did keep things moving. More serious, however, is the fact that no one changes or grows in the piece, except for one wife, who had been a holdout, finally deciding to get even. It doesn't say much good about women (or men for that matter, seeing as they are all busy chasing younger women) that all they can do is exact revenge. I didn't like it in the movie and I don't like it here.

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BUT 'FIRST WIVES' BOUND FOR BREAKUP

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MICHAEL  
RIEDEL

### Broadway Matinee

Last updated: 4:10 am  
August 5, 2009  
Posted: 3:44 am  
August 5, 2009

MY network of theater spies has fanned out to the West Coast to snoop around a couple of high-profile shows aiming for Broadway.

I have enough information to encourage one and annihilate the other.

First, "Catch Me If You Can," the new show from **Marc Shaiman** and **Scott Wittman**, who wrote the delightful score to "Hairspray."

Based on the 2002 **Steven**



Aaron Tveit as Frank Abagnale Jr., a suave con man

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**Spielberg** movie about a  
 con man who posed as,  
 among other things, a  
 Pan Am pilot, "Catch Me  
 If You Can" is in  
 previews in Seattle. (The  
 reviews will be out next  
 week.)

The director is **Jack  
 O'Brien**, who staged  
 "Hairspray," and the  
 book writer is **Terrence  
 McNally**, who did first-  
 rate work on "The Full  
 Monty" and "Ragtime."

**David Rockwell's** slick,  
 contemporary production  
 design "looks absolutely  
 gorgeous," my spy says.  
 "The physical production  
 could go to Broadway  
 tomorrow."

The cast, led by **Norbert  
 Leo Butz** and **Tom  
 Wopat**, is top-notch, with  
 the standout being  
**Aaron Tveit** (the cute kid in "Next to Normal").

"He's wonderful, a real star-in-the-making," one source says.

The score doesn't quite hit the snap-happy heights of "Hairspray," my spies  
 say, but there are some catchy numbers, including a showstopper called "Fifty  
 Checks."

In the second act, the audience is encouraged to "follow the bouncing ball" and  
 sing along.

"They're gobbling that up out here -- they won't in New York," a spy says.

"Catch Me If You Can" is fun and sure-footed; the

one complaint I hear is that, at this point, it doesn't "really go further than the  
 movie, it doesn't have that musical comedy lift yet."

Only a fool would bet against this creative team, however, so consider "Catch Me  
 If You Can" a contender.

Not so "The First Wives Club," which just opened to harsh reviews in San  
 Diego and even harsher word of mouth from potential investors in New York.

The show, based on the popular 1996 divorcee revenge flick, "is hopeless,"  
 says my spy.

The big flaw, by all accounts, is that the musical follows the movie so slavishly,  
 you wonder why they even bothered to put it on a stage.

The novice producers of "The First Wives Club" are scrambling for money; the  
 opening was marred by protesters who claim they're owed tens of thousands of  
 dollars for designing a Web site for the musical.

(The producers aren't commenting.)

The score, by the legendary Motown team of Holland-Dozier-Holland, is  
 "completely generic," says a spy.

A production source adds that the director, **Francesca Zambello**, is "not  
 exactly in her element" when it comes to musical theater.

She's spent most of her career staging Wagner in the opera houses of Europe,  
 which should give you some idea of her "flair" for musical comedy.

Check out her joyless production of "The Little Mermaid," which is so awful that  
 I encourage all those bored and disappointed little girls in the audience to throw  
 their Ariel lunchboxes at the stage.

Officially, "The First Wives Club" is still on track for Broadway.

But potential backers who've seen it in San Diego are keeping their money in  
 their wallets.

Who needs another "9 to 5"?

I'm always happy to hear from readers, especially fans of **Michael Feinstein**,  
 who's putting a show together with **Dame Edna**.

Michael's fan writes:

*Mr. Riedel -- Are you a real theater columnist or do you just pretend to be one?  
 I cannot believe you called Michael "the Aging Ivory Ticker." Obviously, you  
 have no idea as to his super-talented musical background.*

*Do you really get paid for your very unkind comments? You owe Michael a Big  
 Apology.*

*He has millions of fans.*

*Do you?*

Does Francesca Zambello count?

[michael.riedel@nypost.com](mailto:michael.riedel@nypost.com)

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who once posed as a pilot, in "Catch Me If You Can,"  
 bound for B'way.

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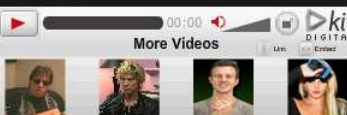
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## BUZZBLOG

OUR DAILY TAKE ON ENTERTAINMENT

### The First Wives Club Musical

The stage musical version of *The First Wives Club* recently opened at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego and will run through August. The roles originated in the movie by Bette Midler, Diane Keaton and Goldie Hawn are now played by Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and respectively.

The show isn't exactly getting rave reviews, but I haven't seen it so I'm in no position to comment. I will say that reading about the show how much I love the original movie. I can't believe that it's been 13 years since the comedy hit the cineplex.

What a cast! Not only did we get the three leading ladies and Stockard Channing as the first wives, we got to see Heather Locklear, Susan Harden and Elizabeth Berkley as the younger women who stole their men. Throw in Maggie Smith and Eileen Heckart and it's an embarrassment. If you haven't seen it in awhile, you owe it to yourself to watch the DVD. It holds up. And in the meantime, voice your choice in today's



Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn, and Diane Keaton in *The First Wives Club*

9:55 am on August 10, 2009

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Posted: Mon., Aug. 3, 2009, 2:20pm PT

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# Critics have issues with 'First Wives'

## Musical receives mixed to unenthusiastic reviews

By CARSON VAUGHAN

*The Verdict looks at critical reaction to key productions opening Off Broadway, regionally and abroad that appear likely candidates for further life on Broadway and/or elsewhere.*

The tuner adaptation of "First Wives' Club" opened its out-of-town tryout run at San Diego's Old Globe Theater on Friday, with initial reviews ranging from mixed to unenthusiastic, signaling that some creative retooling may be in order before the new musical lands in Gotham for its planned Broadway run.

Francesca Zambello ("The Little Mermaid") helms the stage redux of the 1992 novel and the 1996 pic (toplined by Diane Keaton, Bette Midler and Goldie Hawn) about a trio of divorcees who vow to get even with their ex-husbands. Motown team Holland Dozier Holland provides the music in their first Rialto outing.

Show's commercial producers, Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson, have already announced their intentions to bring "First Wives" to Broadway, although no date or theater has yet been confirmed.

Here's what some critics said:

- Although the Los Angeles Times' Charles McNulty acknowledged that the tuner may still manage to please some in the aud, he enumerated multiple reservations. "If you can overlook the often generic R&B elevator music of Motown writing legends Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, the cut-and-pasted and cursorily reimagined book by Rupert Holmes and the fact that the three stars (Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and Sheryl Lee Ralph) seem like they barely know each other, you might very well have a night to remember -- though you'll need plenty of aspirin and water the next day."
- The San Diego Union-Tribune's James Hebert found the first act a bit of a drag but had a good time with the second. Although early on the show moves in "fits and starts," he wrote, "Once the musical finds that rhythm, it's funny, it's kinetic and (for whatever this might be worth) way better than the movie that inspired it."
- Although he gave the thumbs-up to some production elements, Sandiego.com's Welton Jones found the musical largely uninspired: "Despite some really slick production values and a generally tight and perky staging by Francesca Zambello, this is still just another one of those six-finales-in-search-of-a-plot shows."


[Read the review](#)

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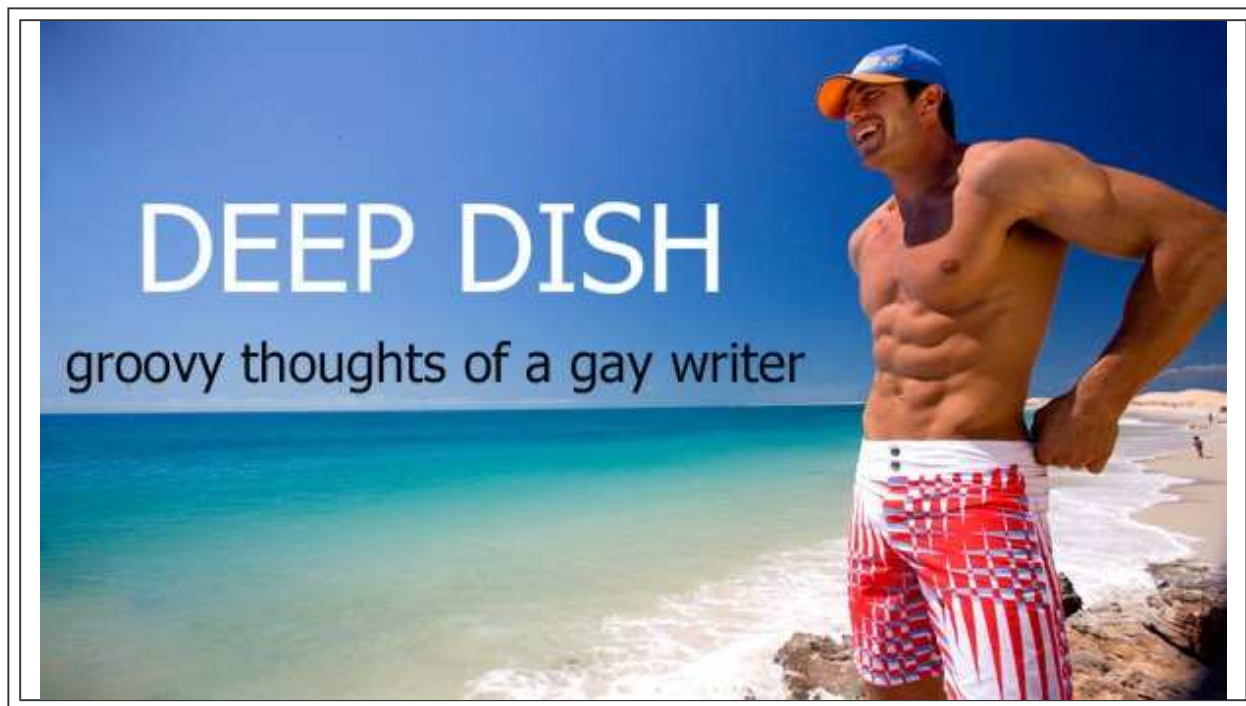
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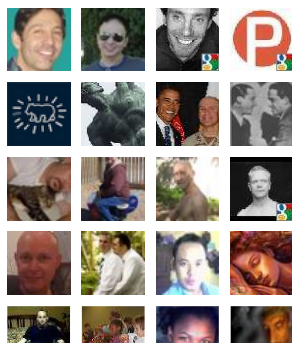


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MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 2009

## Will 'The First Wives Club' sing on Broadway?



Well, the first reviews are in for the new musical version of the 1996 film, *The First Wives Club*, which officially opened on July 31 in its world premiere





THANKS FOR  
READING DEEP  
DISH!

I'm the gay writer of this pop culture blog on all things fabulous. If you'd like to say hello, email me at:  
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Have a groovy day!

Marc



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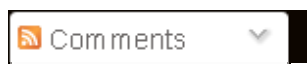
pre-

Broadway engagement at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre. I blogged about the show a few weeks ago after [a promotional video](#) featuring two of its songs was posted on YouTube, so I was curious to see what the critics thought of the musical. Here's what they had to say:

**Charles McNulty of the *Los Angeles Times*:** "If you can overlook the often generic R&B elevator music of Motown writing legends Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, the cut-and-pasted and cursorily reimagined book by Rupert Holmes, and the fact that the three stars (Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and Sheryl Lee Ralph) seem like they barely know each other, you might very well have a night to remember -- though you'll need plenty of aspirin and water the next day . . . Harmlessly entertaining though it may be, this inaugural outing of *The First Wives Club* is not a theatrical marriage made in heaven."

**James Hebert of the *San Diego Union-Tribune*** called the show a "2nd-act dazzler" and that "once the musical finds that rhythm, it's funny, it's kinetic and way better than the movie that inspired it . . . As strong as the main cast is, [Sam] Harris, who takes on the outrageously funny persona of a snooty Italian designer named Duarto, and Sara Chase, who plays all three of the straying husband's young trophies, are absolute gifts to this show."

**Rob Stevens of *TheaterMania*:** "Whether *The First Wives Club* becomes another *Producers* or another *9 to 5* is hard to tell, but it's definitely a real audience pleaser. Director Francesca Zambello's production certainly flows smoothly, aided immensely by a top-notch cast and design team. Still, the total experience doesn't fulfill its potential, due to a less-than-ideal book and score . . . In some ways, book writer Rupert Holmes has actually improved on the original material (and the film's screenplay), adding some nifty one-liners to the script; but he hasn't been able to flesh out the characters and they remain cartoonish. Worse, the score, by legendary Motown composers Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, isn't very successful at establishing character or moving the plot, and the lyrics are often forgettable . . . one comic invention that particularly works here is the casting of Sara Chase



---

### Past Dish of the Day

To see larger pics of the Dish of the Day men, click [here](#).

[Online Surveys & Market Re](#)

as all three of the husband's mistresses."

So judging from these three reviews, the second act is far better than the first, the musical might be better than the movie, and supporting cast members Sam Harris and especially Sara Chase are stealing the show away from its three leading ladies. Also, both the book and the score obviously need a significant amount of fine-tuning before any Broadway opening. However, let's now read some comments that were posted online from some non-critics who have seen *The First Wives Club*:

Nancy: "I saw the play this afternoon and could not stop laughing at Sara Chase's performance. Playing multiple key characters, she was the most dynamic actor of the group and really stood out amongst the cast due to her comic timing."

TSilver: "Sara Chase was the highlight of this show."

Mary: "I saw this last week with my girlfriends. We absolutely loved it and couldn't stop laughing through it."

Sue M.: "My sister and I went to one of the previews last week and we thought it was one of the funniest shows we've seen in a long while."

Scott A.: "The musical score sounds like one song re-written a dozen times. None of the songs seem like [they were] written for any one character. They are interchangeable and dull . . . this show will never make it to Broadway in its current incarnation."

Judging from these candid remarks, it seems that women really love the show, actress Sara Chase might receive a Tony Award nomination someday, and the score is lacking. When a supporting character is receiving most of the accolades from both critics and theatergoers, I would probably consider that a problem if I was one of the producers or creators (but if I was Ms. Chase, I'd be in seventh heaven). And if the music in a musical isn't great, that's an even bigger problem. I would also be worried about coming to Broadway on the heels of the ill-fated [9 to 5](#), which is closing on September 6 after a disappointing four-month run. Since that show

couldn't make a go of it with three female leads (including the star quality of *The West Wing*'s Allison Janney and, of course, Dolly Parton's music), it will be interesting to see if *The First Wives Club* arrives on Broadway during the 2009-10 season.

For tickets and other information to *The First Wives Club* (which runs through August 30), call 619-23-GLOBE or go to [www.theoldglobe.org](http://www.theoldglobe.org).

REACTIONS:      groovalicious (1)      my biscuits are burning! (0)

POSTED BY DEEP DISH AT 1:51 PM

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# Addison DeWitt

sunday, august 2, 2009

## First Wives Club Musical Opens In San Diego



"My name is Addison DeWitt. My native habitat is the theater. In it I toil not, neither do I spin. I am a critic and commentator. I am essential to the theatre."

"While you wait you can read my column. It'll make minutes fly like hours."

"welcome to the theatre"

Critics are beginning to take their first shots at new musical in it's pre-Broadway try out at The Old Globe in San Diego California.

### L.A. Times

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2009/07/theater-review-the-first-wives-club-at-the-old-globe-theatre.html>

### SanDiego.com

[http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com\\_sdca&target=b6dc3e88-8296-404a-9e88-1138e9a9e008](http://www.sandiego.com/index.php?option=com_sdca&target=b6dc3e88-8296-404a-9e88-1138e9a9e008)



The musical stars Barbara Walsh, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Karen Ziemba above in the roles made famous in the film by Bette Midler, Diane Keaton



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and Goldie Hawn below.



Video can be found here ... [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCs5nPUZnY4&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Egaylesbiantimes%2Ecom%2F%3Fid%3D14979&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCs5nPUZnY4&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Egaylesbiantimes%2Ecom%2F%3Fid%3D14979&feature=player_embedded)

Posted by John Pantozzi at 9:46 PM

**1 comments:**

**Linda said...**

Here's another review - 2nd Act Dazzler:

<http://www3.signonsandiego.com/stories/2009/aug/03/1c3globe013539-first-wives-2nd-act-dazzler/?features&zIndex=143080>

I saw it in previews and loved it.

August 3, 2009 8:30:00 AM PDT

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***closely, Eve. It's time you did. I am Addison DeWitt. I am nobody's fool, least of all yours."***



# FEATURES





DON BARTLETT/Los Angeles Times

**REVENGE OF THE SPURNED:** Barbara Walsh, left, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Karen Ziemba band together after their husbands jump into bed with younger girlfriends.

## THE 'FIRST' GO-ROUND

Step by step, line by line, song by song, 'First Wives Club' is the latest Broadway-bound musical to take shape at the Old Globe.

**DIANE HATHMAN** REPORTING FROM SAN DIEGO >>> Everybody here? This afternoon's run-through of the new musical "The First Wives Club" — based on the 1996 movie and Olivia Goldsmith's 1992 novel — is about to begin in a rehearsal room at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre.

Everybody isn't. "Stop! Where is Karen?" demands director Francesca Zambello, referring to Broadway veteran Karen Ziemba, who portrays Annie, the perpetually apologetic "wife" played by Diane Keaton in the movie.

Continues Zambello dryly, "OK, things are going well..."

Anxious group scurrying ensues. From somewhere, Ziemba — apologetically — materializes to take her place alongside the other wives: Barbara Walsh, who plays doting Jewish mother Brenda (movie: Bette Midler) and former Broadway "Dreamgirl" Sheryl Lee Ralph, who is transforming Elyse, the character played by Goldie Hawn in the film, from an insecure blond actress into a glamorous black pop diva. (Ralph replaces Adriane Lenox, who dropped out of the cast for health reasons before rehearsals began.)

Also here is Rupert Holmes — Tony Award winner for "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" and Tony nominee for the book for the Broadway musical "Curtains," which premiered at the Ahmanson Theatre in 2006 — writer of the book for "First Wives Club." Holmes smiles and points to his neck. "If you see this vein in my [See 'First Wives,' Page E6]



# Prepping for their 'First' run

[**'First Wives,'** from Page E1] neck at any point, you are probably seeing something in the show that you will never see again," he says pleasantly.

Everybody's here. Let the opening number, "Wedding Belles," begin.

At this point in the rehearsal period — just over a week before the first preview performance — it would be incorrect to say that Holmes wrote the book for "First Wives Club." Rather, Holmes is still *writing* the book. Just as the former Motown songwriting team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland remain in the middle of rewriting the music and lyrics they've been polishing for two years, and choreographer Lisa Stevens ("Disney's High School Musical 1 and 2" in London's West End and on tour; "Bombay Dreams") is working up a sweat crafting the energetic dance moves.

Even this close to unveiling "First Wives Club" to the public, the phrase "work in progress" remains an understatement for this Broadway-bound production getting its first outing at the Old Globe. The show opens Friday.

And right now, the vein in Holmes' neck is probably as good an indicator as any as to which way the creative wind is blowing.

Steady at the helm is Zambello, who is crossing out dialogue, moving things around, monitoring the emotional temperatures of the cast and pulling it all together. Although she remains deeply involved with opera, serving as artistic advisor to San Francisco Opera, where she is directing Wagner's "Ring" cycle, she has come to prefer directing more populist entertainment. Her last high-profile musical was Disney's "The Little Mermaid" on Broadway.

## It'll be easier next time

While the rehearsal process for any production is essentially the same, the creation of a new musical has more moving parts than presenting a revival. "It's always easier to do the second production," jokes Old Globe artistic director Louis Spisto.

Spisto says the budget for the Old Globe production is about \$2.5 million — a fraction of what the show will cost to produce on Broadway, where budgets for musicals routinely pass the \$10-million mark. Old Globe audiences will see a fully staged show, but with perhaps a slightly smaller ensemble and fewer musicians in the pit.

And although "First Wives Club" has a commercial future, the Old Globe is a nonprofit theater, so the performers trade lower-than-Broadway salaries for the chance to be part of something new. While the Old Globe does not share producer credit with Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson — the show is being presented by "special arrangement" with the Broadway producers — the Old Globe will be a profit participant through the life of the Broadway production as well as major touring productions of the show, as the regional theater originating the show.

For those who missed the novel and movie, "First Wives Club" tells the story of three well-off, middle-aged New York City women whose perfect marriages crumble when their husbands indulge their midlife crises by hopping into bed with younger women. In the Old Globe production, all three of the girlfriends are played by the same actress, Sara Chase. The philandering husbands are portrayed by Brad Oscar, John Dossett and Kevyn Morrow.



DON BARTLETT/LOS ANGELES TIMES

**ENJOY IT WHILE YOU CAN, GUYS:** Brad Oscar, left, Kevyn Morrow and John Dossett play husbands who get what's coming to them.



SEAN MASTERSON FOR THE TIMES

**IN CHARGE:** Zambello directed "Little Mermaid" on Broadway.



LOS ANGELES TIMES

**PERFECT PITCH:** Lamont Dozier, left, Eddie and Brian Holland, who co-wrote songs for Motown greats, collaborate on something new here.



Zambello won't get her most reliable input until the two weeks of previews that follow the five-week rehearsal period — when the laughs, fidgets and silences of the audience begin to shape the show. Audience reaction, Zambello says, provides needed perspective after actors have heard the comic lines so often that they just don't seem funny anymore.

"You generally do a lot of work the day and afternoon before each preview," she says. "You generally can only work on one scene, or one dance ... It's always a race against the clock."

The Old Globe has established something of a reputation for shepherding new musicals to Broadway: "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels," "The Full Monty," "A Catered Affair" and a revival of "Damn Yankees." Creating a new musical in temperate, beachy San Diego, say those involved, is like being at a summer camp — a scary, vein-popping kind of summer camp that offers nonstop rehearsals instead of archery and crafts, and evenings of Shakespeare at the Old Globe's outdoor amphitheater instead of campfires and s'mores.

The process, Holmes says, is always easier away from the distractions of New York. He arrived from the Big Apple about midway through the rehearsal period after keeping in touch with choreographer and director via video conferencing "so I could see the expressions on their faces when they said: 'This scene needs to be shorter,'" Holmes says.

"Most of the time I write brand new musicals," he says. "But it's always exciting to write a musical or play of something that has existed in another medium. I get to write scenes that *might* have happened in the film, or the play version of a musical — but didn't."

For "First Wives Club," the idea was to take a deliberate detour from, well, the *first* "Wives Club."

Unlike another recent show about women's empowerment based on a movie — that would be "9 to 5: The Musical," which premiered at the Ahmanson last year — "First Wives Club" is not a period piece. While the musical "9 to 5" is set in the 1980 movie's pre-Internet era, "First Wives Club" is updated from the mid-'90s to 2009.

The novel's author, Goldsmith, died in 2004 at age 54 — ironically, of complications from cosmetic surgery. And Holmes says he never considered contacting the movie's screenwriter for input. "I knew from the beginning we were going to make huge, fundamental changes in the story, including having Elyse be a black vocalist," he says.

Both Holmes and Zambello thought that racially integrating the cast would give the story a more contemporary feel. Adds Holmes: "I wanted to make sure there was one vocal timbre in our cast that would be the kind of sound that we associated with so much of the music of Holland-Dozier-Holland."

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diane.haithman@latimes.com



SEAN MASTERSON For The Times

**THE PLAYERS:** Ralph, left, Walsh and Ziemba discuss their characters. Ralph plays a pop diva, Walsh is a Jewish mom (Bette Midler's role in the movie) and Ziemba is the apologetic Annie (Diane Keaton onscreen).



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## 'First Wives Club' is forming in San Diego

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Don Bartletti, Los Angeles Times

**REVENGE OF THE SPURNED:** Barbara Walsh, left, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Karen Ziemba band together after their husbands jump into bed with younger girlfriends.

**Step by step, line by line, the play is the latest Broadway-bound musical to take shape at the Old Globe.**

By Diane Haithman  
July 26, 2009

Reporting from San Diego -- Everybody here? This afternoon's run-through of the new musical "The First Wives Club" -- based on the 1996 movie and Olivia Goldsmith's 1992 novel -- is about to begin in a rehearsal room at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre.

Everybody isn't. "Stop! Where is Karen?" demands director Francesca Zambello, referring to Broadway veteran Karen Ziemba, who portrays Annie, the perpetually apologetic "wife" played by Diane Keaton in the movie.

Continues Zambello dryly, "OK, things are going well . . ."

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Anxious group scurrying ensues. From somewhere, Ziemba -- apologetically -- materializes to take her place alongside the other wives: Barbara Walsh, who plays doting Jewish mother Brenda (movie: Bette Midler) and former Broadway "Dreamgirl" Sheryl Lee Ralph, who is transforming Elyse, the character played by Goldie Hawn in the film, from an insecure blond actress into a glamorous black pop diva. (Ralph replaces Adriane Lenox, who dropped out of the cast for health reasons before rehearsals began.)

Also here is Rupert Holmes -- Tony Award winner for "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" and Tony nominee for the book for the Broadway musical "Curtains," which premiered at the Ahmanson Theatre in 2006 -- writer of the book for "First Wives Club." Holmes smiles and points to his neck. "If you see this vein in my neck at any point, you are probably seeing something in the show that you will never see again," he says

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Everybody's here. Let the opening number, "Wedding Belles," begin.

At this point in the rehearsal period -- just over a week before the first preview performance -- it would be incorrect to say that Holmes *wrote* the book for "First Wives Club." Rather, Holmes is still *writing* the book. Just as the former Motown songwriting team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland remain in the middle of rewriting the music and lyrics they've been polishing for two years, and choreographer Lisa Stevens ("Disney's High School Musical 1 and 2" in London's

West End and on tour; "Bombay Dreams") is working up a sweat crafting the energetic dance moves.

Even this close to unveiling "First Wives Club" to the public, the phrase "work in progress" remains an understatement for this Broadway-bound production getting its first outing at the Old Globe. The show opens Friday.

And right now, the vein in Holmes' neck is probably as good an indicator as any as to which way the creative wind is blowing.

Steady at the helm is Zambello, who is crossing out dialogue, moving things around, monitoring the emotional temperatures of the cast and pulling it all together. Although she remains deeply involved with opera, serving as artistic advisor to San Francisco Opera, where she is directing Wagner's "Ring" cycle, she has come to prefer directing more populist entertainment. Her last high-profile musical was Disney's "The Little Mermaid" on Broadway.

**It'll be easier next time**

While the rehearsal process for any production is essentially the same, the creation of a new musical has more moving parts than presenting a revival. "It's always easier to do the *second* production," jokes Old Globe artistic director Louis Spisto.

Spisto says the budget for the Old Globe production is about \$2.5 million -- a fraction of what the show will cost to produce on Broadway, where budgets for musicals routinely pass the \$10-million mark. Old Globe audiences will see a fully staged show, but with perhaps a slightly smaller ensemble and fewer musicians in the pit.

And although "First Wives Club" has a commercial future, the Old Globe is a nonprofit theater, so the performers trade lower-than-Broadway salaries for the chance to be part of something new. While the Old Globe does not share producer credit with Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson -- the show is being presented by "special arrangement" with the Broadway producers -- the Old Globe will be a profit participant through the life of the Broadway production as well as major touring productions of the show, as the regional theater originating the show.

For those who missed the novel and movie, "First Wives Club" tells the story of three well-off, middle-aged New York City women whose perfect marriages crumble when their husbands indulge their midlife crises by hopping into bed with younger women. In the Old Globe production, all three of the girlfriends are played by the same actress, Sara Chase. The philandering husbands are portrayed by Brad Oscar, John Dossett and Kevyn Morrow.

Zambello won't get her most reliable input until the two weeks of previews that follow the five-week rehearsal period -- when the laughs, fidgets and silences of the audience begin to shape the show. Audience reaction, Zambello says, provides needed perspective after actors have heard the comic lines so often that they just don't seem funny anymore.

"You generally do a lot of work the day and afternoon before each preview," she says. "You generally can only work on one scene, or one dance . . . It's always a race against the clock."

The Old Globe has established something of a reputation for shepherding new musicals to Broadway: "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels," "The Full Monty," "A Catered Affair" and a revival of "Damn Yankees." Creating a new musical in temperate, beachy San Diego, say those involved, is like being at a summer camp -- a scary, vein-popping kind of summer camp that offers nonstop rehearsals instead of archery and crafts, and evenings of Shakespeare at the Old Globe's outdoor amphitheater instead of campfires and s'mores.

The process, Holmes says, is always easier away from the distractions of New York. He arrived from the Big Apple about midway through the rehearsal period after keeping in touch with choreographer and director via video conferencing "so I could see the expressions on their faces when they said: 'This scene needs to be shorter,'" Holmes says.

"Most of the time I write brand new musicals," he says. "But it's always exciting to write a musical or play of something that has existed in another medium. I get to write scenes that *might* have happened in the film, or the play version of a musical -- but didn't."

For "First Wives Club," the idea was to take a deliberate detour from, well, the *first* "Wives Club."





Unlike another recent show about women's empowerment based on a movie -- that would be "9 to 5: The Musical," which premiered at the Ahmanson last year -- "First Wives Club" is not a period piece. While the musical "9 to 5" is set in the 1980 movie's pre-Internet era, "First Wives Club" is updated from the mid-'90s to 2009.

The novel's author, Goldsmith, died in 2004 at age 54 -- ironically, of complications from cosmetic surgery. And Holmes says he never considered contacting the movie's screenwriter for input. "I knew from the beginning we were going to make huge, fundamental changes in the story, including having Elyse be a black vocalist," he says.

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## 'First Wives Club' talks about shoes

10:00 AM, July 25, 2009




Let's talk about shoes.

"The First Wives Club" -- the new musical based on the 1996 movie and the 1992 novel, opening July 31 at San Diego's Old Globe -- is all about blasting the stereotype of the washed-up, frumpy middle-aged female as three 50-plus and still fabulous women (Karen Ziemba, Barbara Walsh and Sheryl Lee Ralph) dance and sing their way through this tale of midlife girl power.

In this video, they're hoofing it through segments of the numbers "Ready for a Change" and "Jump for Joy" -- with music and lyrics by Motown veterans Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, and choreography by Lisa Stevens.

But some stereotypes die hard, and during a recent "can we talk" chat with the girls at the Old Globe, the conversation eventually turned to shoes. Not the spike-heeled, \$500 pumps and mules that have always seem to dominate the lives (and pocketbooks) of the "Sex and the City" characters, but the footwear required to make it through Stevens' energetic choreography.

Included in Stevens' credits is the stage choreography for "Disney's High School Musical" 1 and 2, and as she put the three women through their paces during an earlier rehearsal for "Jump for Joy," she seemed disinclined to cut any of the jumps because her stars are a few years past the senior prom. Ziemba's ability to trust was called into play as she let herself fall from a table into the waiting arms of a bevy of male dancers.



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Culture Monster is not sure whether the move will end up in the show, but on that day a favorite Stevens invention for Ziemba in "Jump for Joy" was the "shopping cart," in which Ziemba's timid character, Annie, pantomimes plucking items off the grocery shelves and dumping them into her basket, with attitude -- she's husband-free now, honey, and girlfriend chooses what *she* wants.

The First Wives talked a little bit about men; Ralph, though now happily married to Pennsylvania state Sen. Vincent J. Hughes, recalls the pain of a divorce. "It's sometimes weird going through the script. . . . When I was divorced, I felt like I was a failure; I felt like a statistic. My self-esteem was just gone," she says. Walsh points out that her own life is the reverse of the wives in the show, who are dumped for younger women: Her husband, stage director Jack Cummings, is 13 years *younger* than she is. "Does that make me a cougar?" she asks slyly.

But back to the shoes: While putting on high heels makes it easier to feel empowered onstage, it's also hard to get used to. "I have to figure out what kind of padding will keep me up there for that length of time," Ralph jokes. "Had I known that when I was younger, I wouldn't have some of the problems I have now -- but no, I wouldn't listen. Honey, it's sensible shoes now. It's very sad."

Says Walsh, who hasn't had to dance since her dinner theater days, "Feet are very tough when you get older. About five years ago I tried to put my foot in my wedding shoe that I wore when I was 15 years younger, a Peter Fox, and I couldn't. I thought I was still a size 9."

But those high heels are going on for the show, no matter what: "Vanity -- that's right, baby, bring on those Jimmy Choos," Ralph crows. Adds Walsh with a laugh, "Bunions and all!"

Read less about footwear, more about the making of the pre-Broadway musical "The First Wives Club" at the Old Globe in [my story in Sunday's Arts & Books section](#).

-- Diane Haithman

*Photo: Karen Ziemba in "The First Wives Club." Credit: Don Bartletti / Los Angeles Times*

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Annie (Karen Ziemba, left), Brenda (Barbara Walsh) and Elyse (Sheryl Lee Ralph) work to keep their friendships together after their marriages melt down in "The First Wives Club," the new musical at the Old Globe. *Earnie Grafton / Union-Tribune photos*

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By James Hebert  
THEATER CRITIC

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"First Wives" scribe Rupert Holmes had a pop hit 30 years ago with "Escape (The Pina Colada Song)," but is also a Tony-winning writer and composer.

#### DETAILS

##### "The First Wives Club"

A world premiere

**When:** Now in previews. Opens Friday.

Tuesdays-Wednesdays, 7 p.m.;

Thursdays-Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 and 7 p.m.; through Aug. 23

**Where:** Old Globe Theatre, 1363 Old Globe Way, Balboa Park

**Tickets:** \$66-\$92

**Phone:** (619) 234-5623

**Online:** TheOldGlobe.org

## ► 'WIVES'

CONTINUED FROM E1

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It was important to me not to make it slavishly like the film, and really to make it more of a positive spin at the end.

"I mean, of course the men get their comeuppance in our musical. But everyone finds their next chapter. And I think that's the hardest thing in divorce — finding your next chapter, your next part of life."

Besides, Zambello argues, "Getting even's not dramatic. Vengeance is stagnant. Once it happens, it's "And then ...?"

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"We could've cast it all a bit younger," says Zambello. "But people split up in their late 40s — if it hasn't happened before, that's when it happens. The kids have grown up; people have changed. I thought it was important to be age-truthful."

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SEE 'WIVES,' E2

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And after nearly four decades, were the three somehow able to pick up right where they left off?

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For this show, anyway, it's about being part of a club, instead of swinging one.

James Hebert: (619) 293-2040; jim.hebert@uniontrib.com; blog, houseseats.uniontrib.com; Twitter, jimhebert



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**By James Hebert**

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

2:00 a.m. July 26, 2009

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The songwriting team of Brian Holland (from left), Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland.

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By The Union-Tribune

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# The First Wives Club

A WORLD PREMIERE AT THE OLD GLOBE -  
THE REINVENTION OF A COMEDY CLASSIC

by bill biss

(l to r) Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and Sheryl Lee Ralph in *The First Wives Club*

Many film buffs remember the classic teaming of Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton in the 1996 film called *The First Wives Club*. Now, the premise of this film and book by Olivia Goldsmith is being reconstructed for the Broadway-bound and new theatre musical of the same name. An outstanding new score has been created by the wizards of Motown and Rock and Roll Hall of Famers Holland-Dozier-Holland. These three men etched a musical path for The Supremes, Marvin Gaye, The Jackson Five and countless other musical luminaries with their songs.

Tony-award-winning Rupert Holmes wrote the theatrical book for this show and the esteemed and award-winning Francesca Zambello, well known for her skill and excellence, directs *The First Wives Club*. This is a rare opportunity to catch the show in August over the course of its run at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre until August 23. In a recent "first look" at *The First Wives Club*, *The Rage Monthly* spoke with director Zambello, star Sheryl Lee Ralph (known for her star turn as Deena in the original Broadway production of *Dreamgirls*) and the sensational singer Sam Harris. All three are bubbling over with enthusiasm for this world premiere musical production of *The First Wives Club*.

Francesca Zambello explains about the impetus behind any musical production, "I cannot tell you...when you start a new musical, the process is so very, very different than anything else. You begin with an idea, a germ of a thought; let's make a musical about? Usually the journey takes several years, musicals take a long gestation period. It's sort of like ostriches... their eggs are underground for three years or something." Continuing, she elaborates, "It's really a process that happens between Holland-Dozier-Holland (HDH) who came up with a number

of songs, and then Rupert and myself in terms of 'what is the story to tell? I think it is vital NOT to tell the movie. All great pieces of theatre, they start as one thing. This began as a book in the 1980s. In the 1990s, it was made into a film. Now, almost at the end of the aughts, let's hope that it's going to make a great musical (laughter)."

Elaborating on this transformation, Zambello adds, "It was important when we first looked at it to think about the themes that were inherent in the author's mind. It's very much of course about family and about divorce, about what the women's journeys were and about how the women bettered themselves through their friendship. In a way, the novel doesn't focus on vengeance and getting back, it focuses on these three women bonding together through the suicide of their dear friend, which brings them together. So, those themes were something that Rupert and I wanted to think about as we saw the piece for today! I think that the message of empowerment for everyone, a rediscovering of self-esteem and self-confidence and the meaning of friendship were crucial things."

The musical production is very much set in today. Zambello stresses this important point, "When we look at the topography today, it was very important that it wasn't about just three middle-class white women, but rather that we should make one of the characters black. So, it seemed logical that the woman who was the star in the movie, played by Goldie Hawn, could be a fantastic black performer. Also, we have this incredible music by HDH who wrote so much for three women [The Supremes]. So, it seemed logical for us to go into that pocket of the black couple, the Jewish couple and the very WASP couple. This was definitely something that I felt would represent our world and our life as it is today for *The First Wives Club*."

# Sheryl Lee Ralph

IS "ELYSE" IN *THE FIRST WIVES CLUB*.  
A DREAMGIRL RECEIVES HER DUE.

Just as director Francesca Zambello referred to a "fantastic black performer," one beautiful and talented woman who fits that bill is none other than Sheryl Lee Ralph. It is uncanny that she would once play Deena, a role based on the career of Diana Ross in *Dreamgirls* and now... she is performing all new songs from Holland-Dozier-Holland who gave us all the top hits of The Supremes. *The Rage Monthly* took notice of that and this stunning entertainer known as Sheryl Lee Ralph who plays opposite Barbara Walsh as Brenda and Karen Ziemba as Annie.

**Rage:** Starring in this production of *The First Wives Club*, it strikes me as a "42nd Street" moment for you (Sheryl took over for Adriane Lenox in the role of Elyse).

Sheryl Lee Ralph: Oh my god! How right on it are you? Quite literally, weeks ago, I get a call that is like "Can you be here yesterday?" I have a one-woman show that I tour the country with and I was booked all summer. I was like, "No!" I can't cancel all these dates... I got two kids; my son is getting ready to go off to his first semester in college. My head just started spinning.

They sent me the sides (Elyse's lines) and oh my god, this is worth making a major adjustment. I called my husband who is so wonderful. He was on the senate floor and he said, "Baby. Let's weigh the pros and the cons." (laughter) I said, "We're not passing a bill here!" Together, we worked it out and I talked to my kids and everything. All together, we made the decision that this was worth it. It worked out even better because some folks were jazzed that I was doing this. I guess there has been a lot of pre-buzz with theatre folks about the show.

**Rage:** Does it strike you pink that you starred as Deena based on Diana Ross in *Dreamgirls* and now you are actually singing the songs written by Holland-Dozier-Holland for this one-time reunion of musical legends [HDH].

SLR: You have to touch me on that (she gives me the high five)! Who could write that? Nobody putting together public relations could ever write that and put those things together to be so perfect. All of these years, people say, "You been playing Diana Ross, Diana Ross," and now I'm in a show where her writers have written all these next hits. It's amazing.



You know what's even freakier? When you really look at it, this character is Deena's second act. You could see how this could very well be Deena Jones. That Deena Jones has had the movie career, she has had the record career, and she's got the manager she's absolutely crazy about... he has spoiled her to this point and has dropped her like a hot potato!

**Rage:** Out of the three wives, Elyse is definitely the most self-absorbed. Please describe her.

SLR: Elyse Elliott is probably tantamount to Whitney Houston with a little bit of Gladys Knight and a nice shot of Patti LaBelle on top of it. You know what I'm saying? This is an absolutely wildly talented and very comfortable woman with flair. She's rich as the day she was born! This diva doesn't care about anything. Guess what? She doesn't care if she's late because the world revolves on her clock. She's that kind of woman.

She says it in a song, "Selfish, self-absorbed, sometimes sadistic, materialistic" but she has to change all of that.

**Rage:** Every actor in a well-done production has what is called "his or her moment."

SLR: I have that moment in a song called "This is Me Now." It's that wonderful 11th hour number. It's just an incredible number. Yes. These are great questions by the way.

**Rage:** Thank you. I'm so looking forward to seeing the show.



# Sam Harris

BRINGS ON THE HUMOR AND THE SONG IN *THE FIRST WIVES CLUB*

Ever since his very first appearance on TV's *Star Search*, Sam Harris has been delighting audiences with his soulful and skilled vocal qualities. From cabaret

to television and to Broadway and back, Harris has proven time and time again that he can deliver the goods and then some with his acting and singing talents. Now, he comes to The Old Globe stage for the world-premiere of *The First Wives Club*. Sam will play the character of "Duane." It isn't as simple as all that, he recently adopted a boy with his husband, Danny. Read on...

**Rage:** You and Danny adopted in April of last year. Are Danny and your son, Cooper, coming out to be with you for this run of *The First Wives Club*?

Sam Harris: Yes. Danny travels a lot, so when Danny is in town, we're all here. But, I have some help. I have a nanny to help us. Usually Cooper is with the nanny during the day when I'm at rehearsals and sometimes Cooper comes with me to rehearsals. He started walking at about nine and a half months. He has this thing where he goes on laps all over the sets, backstage and dressing rooms. He's fourteen months old now. It's a full time job. I'm doing eight hours of rehearsal and eight hours of Cooper. Daddy is doing double duty now.

**Rage:** How did you become involved with this amazing show?

SH: I got involved from a couple of the producers asking me, "Now, since you have a baby... are you interested in doing Broadway?" I said, "Yeah." I'm not going to not do Broadway for the next eighteen years. This is a great time as Cooper isn't in school yet. I went to New York and did a reading and then this Old Globe production was here and hopefully, it's on its way to New York. I became involved several months ago.

**Rage:** From the couple numbers I heard, the music has really got that spark of Holland-Dozier-Holland.

SH: There are some really great hooks. I have this song in the first act called "A Man Like Me." The character of Brenda is my best friend. I'm telling her to stop fantasizing about getting back with this man. What you need... and I start talking about the things she deserves. And the song is basically what I realize is that she needs "A Man Like Me."

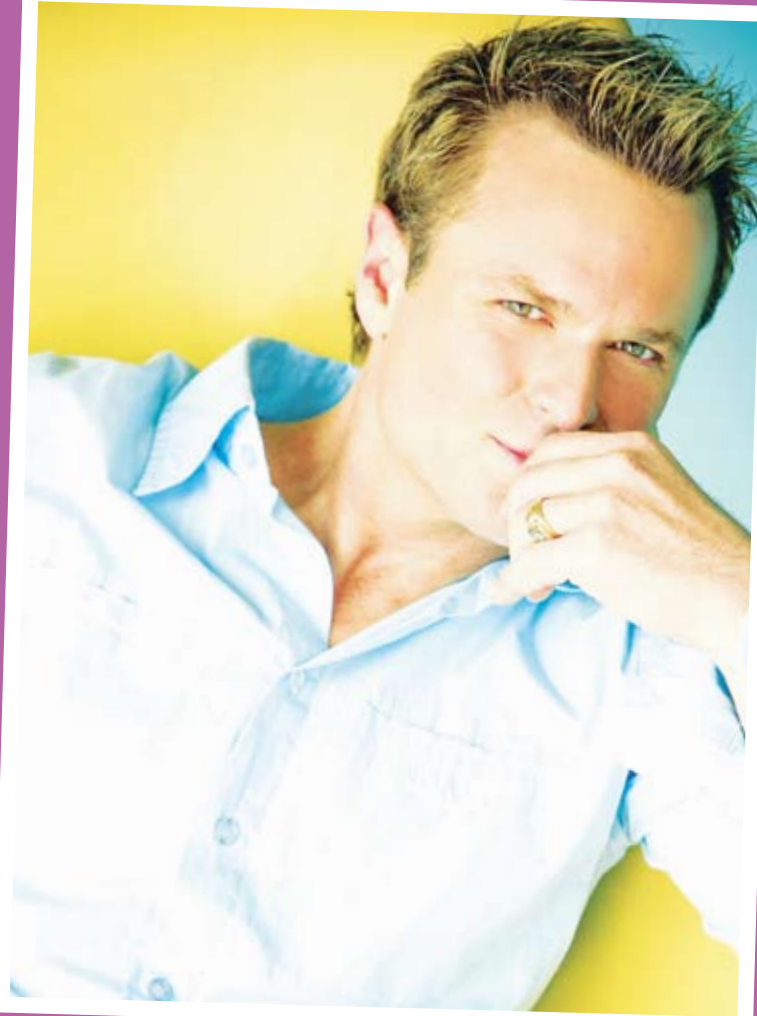
As her best friend, I do this whole thing about how fabulous I am (laughter). And that she deserves a straight version of Duane. It's really fun. It takes place in a Madison Avenue shop and all the shop boys dance and it's so much fun. I can't wait for people to see it.

**Rage:** Are you playing multiple characters in this production?

SH: No, I'm not playing multiple characters. My character plays multiple characters. In other words, Sam Harris isn't playing several characters. My character named Duane becomes what Francesca (director) calls the "fourth wife" and I am a part of all the schemes. I pretend to be a designer named "Duerto" and I pretend to be several people to help them pull off their revenge.

**Rage:** What do you feel is the "gay" appeal or just appeal, for that matter, of this show?

SH: It's a great score. I think you noticed that it is reminiscent of some of the great hooks that Holland-Dozier-Holland are known for. I think it's going to be appealing to a mass audience. I think the gay community, particularly with musicals, can



smell it when it's good. I think this has it. Harold Wheeler, our orchestrator, orchestrated *Dreamgirls*, *The Life*... a lot of things that have that urban kind of thing, that groove... He's a genius! With him orchestrating these things on top of what they've (HDH) written is magical. I'm as excited about hearing that orchestra play these songs as anything. These people must think I'm 25...every time I'm on, they've got me everywhere.

**Rage:** Be grateful!

SH: (laughter) It's so much fun. It's a great, energetic and ridiculous part!



# LA JOLLA LIGHT

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## Great music permeates 'The First Wives Club'

Wednesday, July 15, 2009

By Diana Saenger

Transformation of novels into movies and then as stage plays is common. From the novel to a hit movie in 1996, "The First Wives Club" is now a Broadway-bound musical currently in rehearsal at The Old Globe. The comedy about three wives who band together after being dumped by their husbands is brought to life by a musical extravaganza of original music. "The First Wives Club" runs July 17 through Aug. 30.

Brenda (Barbara Walsh), Annie (Karen Ziemba) and Elyse (Sheryl Lee Ralph), former college roommates who have just reunited, discover they have something in common. They've been dumped by their husbands for younger women.

"This is a story of empowerment," Ziemba said. "It resembles the movie and novel a little, but the book by Tony-winner Rupert Holmes is a bit darker. The big diva film star is now a pop diva singer much in the vein of Patti Bell, Aretha Franklin or Diana Ross."

Tony-winning actor-singer-dancer Ziemba ("Annie") is one of Broadway's most versatile performers, having starred in "Contact," "Crazy For You," as Roxie Hart in "Chicago," and recently in the Globe's "Six Degrees of Separation." She was drawn to this play by the opportunity to work with director Francesca Zambello, who is the artistic adviser at San Francisco Opera, has won three Olivier Awards and has credits at The Metropolitan Opera.

"I loved the story, and it's nice to have stage roles for seasoned actresses," Ziemba said. "Francesca is very bright with wonderful conceptual ideas and has a great visual eye of how the show will look."

The male cast includes John Dossett, Kevyn Morrow, Brad Oscar, Sam Harris, Ari Lerner and Austyn Myers.

"To see a bunch of hot guys over 40 accompanying us on stage who still have stamina and are attractive is wonderful," Ziemba said.

At the heart of the play is the music with a score by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, who created hits for Martha and The Vandellas, The Miracles, Marvin Gaye, The Four Tops and The Supremes, and the orchestration by Harold Wheeler.

"The music is all original but with a Motown sound and that familiar Motown beat," Ziemba said. "It's so much fun, and those big ballads are so emotional."

Because the cast must sing, act and dance, the team of creative artists behind the scenes is essential to what is seen on stage. Ziemba is enamored by the group assembled for this production.

"We have an incredible set designer (Peter J. Davison, "Blithe Spirit") and costume designer (Paul Tazewell, "Guys and Dolls," "The Color Purple")," she said. "And the difference of going from a rehearsal room to a set being lit by designer Mark McCullough (revival of "Jesus Christ Superstar") creates a wonderful nuance in our performances. Working with these artists and choreographer Lisa Stevens is an incredible gathering of people with like minds."

Ziemba feels patrons will respond to several elements in "The First Wives Club," including the empowerment of friends helping one another and the music.

"It's about doing unto others and not blaming anyone," she said. "And with this music, you can't help but bebop in your seat. It just makes you feel good."

### 'The First Wives Club'

- July 17-Aug. 30
- The Old Globe
- 1363 Old Globe Way
- (619) 23-GLOBE
- [www.theoldglobe.org](http://www.theoldglobe.org)



Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and Sheryl Lee Ralph star in The Old Globe's world premiere musical of 'The First Wives Club.'

Craig Schwartz



**Diana Saenger**

Diana Saenger is a freelance writer for the La Jolla Light. To make comments about articles, contact [talkback@lajollalight.com](mailto:talkback@lajollalight.com).

## Encinitas couple say goodbye, in song

An Encinitas couple who have been longtime fixtures on the local music scene will formally say goodbye to their friends and fans Saturday with a concert in San Diego.

### Backstage



KRAGEN

Rebecca and David Randle will head to the Pacific Northwest around the end of next month to take advantage of the region's growing acoustic music scene and for a better quality of life. But before they go, the acoustic duo wants to spend one last local evening together onstage, playing the music that first brought them together six years ago.

The Randles have deep roots in San Diego. Guitarist David Randle grew up in Chula Vista and kept San Diego as his home base while touring during the '70s with his band The Brain Police (which played with the likes of Cream, the Who, Steppenwolf, the Byrds, Jefferson Airplane and Buffalo Springfield, to name a few). From 1979 to 1990, he owned a local music store, then retired from the music business until 2001, when he met his future wife, the former Rebecca Conley.

Rebecca grew up in Hawaii and was a session singer for A&M Records in Los Angeles before chronic bronchitis (which her doctor attributed to L.A.'s smog) forced her to leave the city in 1989 and resettle in North County. She built a strong career here as a socially conscious coffeehouse/festival singer, performing at places such as the Temecula Balloon & Wine Festival, the Belly Up, Ki's, the Rhythm Cafe and the Encinitas Street Fair. In 2001, she hired David to serve as her producer. They fell in love, married a year later and have been recording, teaching (Rebecca offers voice lessons, David specializes in guitar and songwriting classes) and performing together ever since.

Yet for all their success together, the Randles have been quietly coping with something darker: Rebecca's chronic health issues. Exposed to high levels of pesticide and mercury as a child, Rebecca has a suppressed immune system that makes her dangerously sensitive to chemicals, fumes, pollution and other man-made materials. The move to the Northwest will not only expand their musical horizons but will, they hope, offer cleaner air and a more healthful living environment for Rebecca, who said she plans to write an online "e-book" about her health struggles.

The couple said they visited Portland, Ore., in July and were thrilled with their reception there. They not only had a successful concert, they



Rebecca and David Randle of Encinitas.

made positive contacts with other musicians and a record producer who's eager to record with them.

"We're really excited," David said. "Sixty percent of all the acoustic music festivals in the country are in the Pacific Northwest. This is an enormous opportunity for us." Rebecca adds: "A lot of famous, talented musicians are moving there. We feel like we're getting in on the beginning of a groundswell."

Their Encinitas home is now on the market, and they're excited that San Diego music promoter Cary Driscoll has offered them Saturday night's slot in his Acoustic Music San Diego series. So far, more than 70 tickets have been sold and they hope to double that by Saturday. David said that the majority of ticket-buyers are friends, family and colleagues whom they both know on a first-name basis, but they're hoping to make a lot of new friends at the show as well.

As in all of their concerts, the Randles will offer networking tables where people can meet and greet each other, and their friend, rock 'n' roll artist Patrick Conley, has been invited to show some of his paintings at the event. The concert will feature songs from the couple's recent CD "R&D," some new songs from a CD they hope to release next spring, as well as some of the torch songs (like "Summertime") for which Rebecca is known.

Although the Randles hope to find a new life and career in the Northwest, the Randles say that San Diego will never be far from their thoughts — or their travel planner.

"Although it will be bittersweet for me to be saying goodbye to everyone on Saturday, I'm really trying to stay positive and focus not on how I'm leaving my friends here, but how I'm leaving to make new friends up there. Our goal is to come back twice or maybe three times a year to perform, so this is just a 'goodbye tour now."

The Randles' "Goodbye San Diego" concert will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at 4650 Mansfield St. in San Diego. Tickets are \$20. Call (760) 632-8043 for tickets.



Mark your calendars. Smithsonian Magazine's annual Museum Day is coming up on Sept. 27. The magazine launched the program four years ago to encourage museums around the country to open their doors free to the public one day each year.

Last year, more than 650 museums nationwide joined the program, and more than 100,000 visitors queued up for the event.

This year, 14 San Diego County museums will offer free admission as part of Museum Day. In order to take advantage of the program, museum-goers need to bring along an admission pass that can be found either in the September issue of Smithsonian Magazine, or downloaded online at [microsite.smithsonianmag.com/museumday/](http://microsite.smithsonianmag.com/museumday/).

Local participants include the California Center for the Arts, Escondido Museum; Mingei International Museums in Escondido and San Diego; the Museums of Contemporary Art in San Diego and La Jolla; the Museum of San Diego History; Quail Botanical Gardens in Encinitas; the Museum of Making Music in Carlsbad; the San Diego Air & Space Museum; the San Dieguito Heritage Museum in Encinitas; the San Diego Archaeological Center; the Adobe Chapel Museum; the Whaley House in Old Town and the William Heath Davis House.



San Diego Fashion Week, a seven-day extravaganza that was scheduled to debut Sept. 28 at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina, was abruptly postponed last week.

Event director Allison Andrews, a San Diego-based fashion publicist, was injured in an accident, and doctors ordered that she spend at least three months recuperating from the broken bones and nerve damage that she incurred.

"There was no way we could pull off the event the way that I wanted to, and unfortunately I had to make this decision so that we could make sure it was the strongest event it could be once I've had a chance to recover," Andrews said.

The weeklong event was scheduled to include daily fashion shows, dinners, parties and shopping events, most of them taking place under a tent outside the Sheraton. Andrews said that she hopes to announce a new date this week, and it will be sometime during the first quarter of 2009. Fashion Week-goers are advised to hold on to their tickets and check back frequently on the event's Web site ([www.fashionweeksd.com](http://www.fashionweeksd.com)) for news.

► BACKSTAGE, 31

## ► BACKSTAGE

Continued from 2

"The positive thing is that this event was turning into quite a success, and it's going to be an even grander success with more fun and fluff when we do it next year. Everybody we had involved is still happily on board, which is wonderful, so we just need to find the right time to do it, and we'll be back."



The Old Globe has announced it will stage the world premiere of yet another musical based on a Hollywood film — "The First Wives Club," which will make its pre-Broadway tryout at the Balboa Park theater next July.

It will be the third such film-based, Broadway-bound premiere at the Globe in eight years (the others are the David Yazbek-scored/Jack O'Brien-directed "The Full Monty" and "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels").

"The First Wives Club" will feature a book by Tony-winner Rupert Holmes ("Curtains!," "Say Goodnight Gracie") and a score by brothers Brian and Eddie Holland and Lamont Dozier (the Motown songwriting team behind Marvin Gaye, The Supremes, the Four Tops and Martha and the Vandellas). Musical/opera director Francesca Zambello ("Disney's The Little Mermaid") will helm the project.

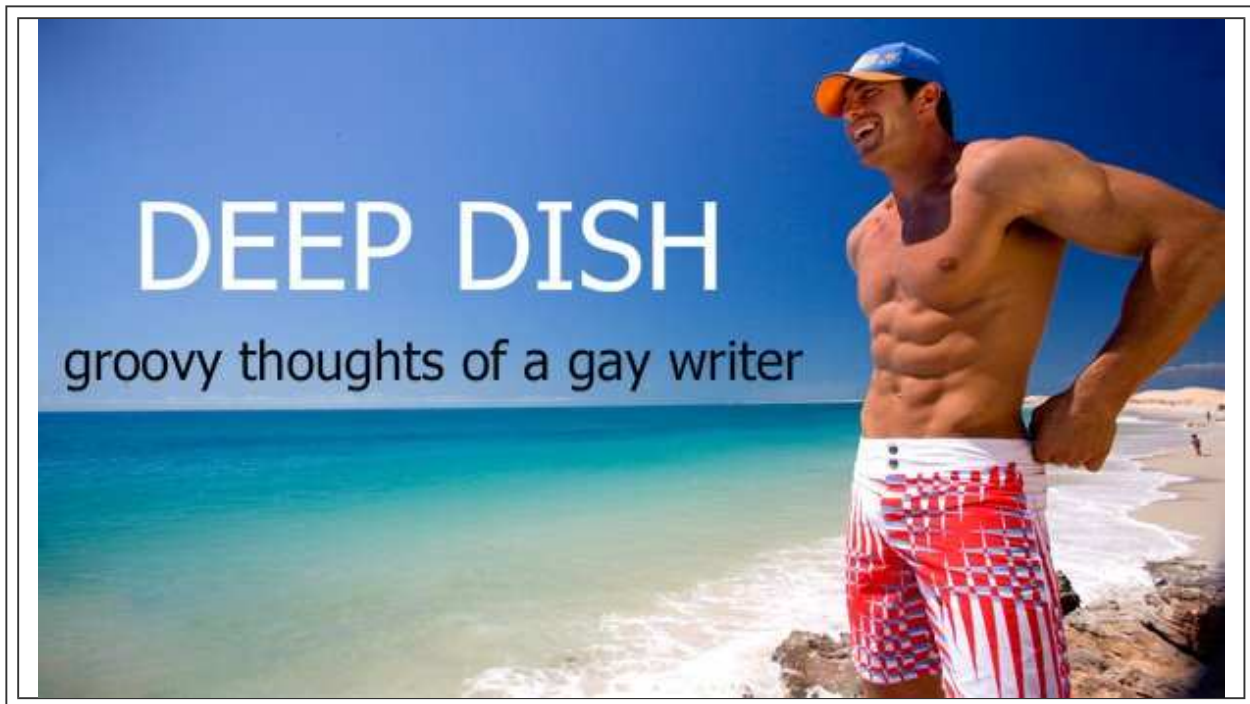
"The First Wives Club," a 1996 film starring Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton, is about three divorced women who seek revenge on their ex-husbands. The movie was based on a novel by Olivia Goldsmith.

Casting has not been announced, but Broadway Web sites, magazines and blogs are speculating that the show will be revamped with a more soulful/R&B score for three black actresses, led by Queen Latifah.

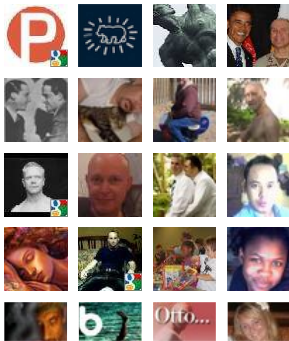


The Old Globe on Monday also announced the rest of its lineup for summer 2009. The Summer Shakespeare Festival returns with two plays by William Shakespeare — "Twelfth Night" and "Henry VIII" — along with Edmund Rostand's classic French comedy/drama "Cyrano de Bergerac." Festival director (and Old Globe resident artistic chief Darko Tresnjak) will helm "Cyrano" and "Henry VIII" and Paul Mullins (director of this summer's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and last summer's "Measure for Measure") will direct "Twelfth Night."

The summer's in-the-round production will be Charles Ludlam's gothic English comedy "The Mystery of Irma Vep," which spoofs British literary classics from "Jane Eyre" and "Wuthering Heights" to "Rebecca." Director Henry Wischamper will make his Globe debut.

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THURSDAY, JULY 23, 2009

## Broadway Bound: The First Wives Club (the musical)



Earlier today when I saw the video below of

two songs from the new Broadway-bound musical of the 1996 film, *The First Wives Club*, I, of course, thought I should share it with my readers--many of whom share my passion for musical theater.

However, I will refrain at this time from expressing my own personal





THANKS FOR  
READING DEEP  
DISH!

I'm the gay writer of this  
pop culture blog on all  
things fabulous. If you'd  
like to say hello, email  
me at:  
**deepdishdrama@aol.co  
m**

Have a groovy day!

Marc



SUBSCRIBE TO DEEP

opinion of the clip, since the show only began previews on July 17 and I haven't seen the entire production. But I will tell you that the knives are already sharpening over on [Talkin' Broadway's popular All That Chat website](#), where no one is holding back on how they feel. Here are a few of the *nicer* comments that have been posted today:

"It frightens me how low the standard is these days for mounting and investing lots of money in a new musical."

"This makes *9 to 5* look like high art!"

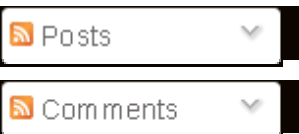
"And they're using this to promote the show?"

"It is absolutely fair to judge the show by the clip the producers make available. The assumption is they want the clip to help you make a judgment on the show. If they're confident releasing it, then they deserve what they get."



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for blood, but we all should remember that *Wives* is still a work-in-progress at the moment. That said, I do have to agree with the final remark, since someone from San Diego's Old Globe theater (where the show is running through August 23) posted the video on YouTube today. Another person thought composer Rupert Holmes (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*), who is *Wives'* book writer, should also be writing the music and lyrics instead of Brian Holland,




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### Past Dish of the Day

To see larger pics of the Dish of the Day men, click [here](#).

[Online Surveys & Market Re](#)

Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, who are best known for such '60s hits as "Stop! In the Name of Love" and "Reach Out I'll Be There." This is the trio's first joint project in many years.

The musical does feature a talented cast, including Sam Harris (*The Life, Grease*) and Sheryl Lee Ralph (*Dreamgirls, Thoroughly Modern Millie*, TV's *Designing Women*), Barbara Walsh (*Falsettos, Company*), and Karen Ziemba (*Curtains, Contact, Steel Pier*) in the Goldie Hawn, Bette Midler and Diane Keaton roles, respectively. So for their sake, I'm hoping that director Francesca Zambello (*The Little Mermaid*) is able to turn *The First Wives Club* into a big Broadway hit down the road. It will be interesting to read what the *real* critics have to say about the show--and to see if their reviews echo any of the same sentiments being said today.



REACTIONS:      groovalicious (0)      my biscuits are burning! (0)

POSTED BY DEEP DISH AT 11:34 PM

LABELS: BARBARA WALSH, BROADWAY, KAREN ZIEMBA, MUSICALS, RUPERT HOLMES, SAM HARRIS, SHERYL LEE RALPH, THE FIRST WIVES CLUB

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### 5 COMMENTS:

Eric Henwood-Greer said...

Gotta agree--I love the old Motown team but what have they even

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## Sneak Peek Of “First Wives Club” - Opening Tonight

Posted by [Jonathan Young](#) on Friday, July 24, 2009 · [Leave a Comment](#)

The [Old Globe](#) opens its much-anticipated *First Wives Club – A New Musical* tonight (it’s been in previews since last Friday). This Broadway-bound world premiere plays through Aug. 23, as part of the Globe’s 2009 Summer Season.

*The First Wives Club* is a funny, moving and empowering new musical based on the smash-hit movie comedy and Olivia Goldsmith’s bestselling novel. Former college friends reunite at middle-age and soon discover they share the same unhappy story – their ungrateful husbands careened into midlife by dumping them for younger women. Inspired by their renewed friendship, the three women band together and take back their lives in style!



*Watch a Special Preview Clip [HERE!](#)*

The cast features Broadway veterans Barbara Walsh (*Company*, *Hairspray*) as “Brenda,” Karen Ziemba (*Contact*, *Curtains*) as “Annie,” Sheryl Lee Ralph (*Dreamgirls*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*) as “Elyse,” John Dossett (*Gypsy*) as “Aaron,” Kevyn Morrow (*Dreamgirls*) as “Bill,” Brad Oscar (*The Producers*) as “Morty,” Sara Chase as “Trophy Wife,” Sam Harris (*The Life*) as “Duane,” Ari Lerner and San Diego’s Austyn Myers alternating as “Jason.”

The musical will be produced on Broadway by Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson, with a theatre and dates to be announced.

### First Wives Club - A New Musical

*Presented by the Old Globe*  
July 17 - Aug. 23

Old Globe Theatre, Lowell Davies Festival Theatre (in Balboa Park)  
Box office: (619) 23-GLOBE (234-5623)  
Online: [otheoldglobe.org](http://otheoldglobe.org)

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**Posted: Fri., Aug. 7, 2009, 3:35pm PT**

# Broadway's the place for second acts

## Creatives use theater to jumpstart their careers

By [ROBERT HOFER](#)

When F. Scott Fitzgerald said, "There are no second acts in American lives," he must have been looking westward at his own failed career in Hollywood. Certainly, he couldn't have been glancing back over his shoulder at Broadway.

It can appear these days that the theater is nothing but second acts for creatives looking to jumpstart their careers.

Let's begin with the most eyebrow-raising entry: It was announced recently that Jerry Lewis will make his Broadway directorial debut with the new tuner version of "The Nutty Professor," being written by Marvin Hamlisch and Rupert Holmes, who are two men who should know better. In Hollywood, the powers behind Eddie Murphy knew enough to say no to Lewis' wishes to star in the 1996 remake of the 1963 screen comedy.

Who really expects "Nutty Professor" to make it to Broadway with Lewis attached? Perhaps the same people who are convinced that the legendary Motown team of Holland/Dozier/Holland are "Broadway bound" with their first stage tuner, "The First Wives Club." *Daily Variety* called their efforts "hammered out in generic Motown terms," while the L.A. Times agreed, citing the show's "often generic R&B elevator music."

Paramount, which controls "Club" rights, was reluctant to sell the stage rights, says Lamont Dozier, until they were told the musical would reunite the H/D/H team. That team is a known brand. Would the Hollywood types have jumped at newer Broadway-centric names such as David Yazbek or Adam Guettel? Or simply said, "Who?" and passed on the project?

Dolly Parton's first tuner, "9 to 5," did make it to Broadway, but will lose its entire capitalization when it shuts next month after a short run. Investors ponied up the \$15 million on the salability of a singer-songwriter who would not be appearing onstage.

Old Broadway hands might point to the fact that both these shows were spawned in Hollywood with first-time legit producers attached. Which does not excuse the Tony Awards for milking Parton's erstwhile fame when it had her sing the "9 to 5" title song on this year's telecast. But then here's an org that nommed Jane Fonda ("33 Variations"), returning to the boards after a 46-year absence, over Carla Gugino ("Desire Under the Elms") or Tovah Feldshuh ("Irena's Vow").

The Tonys' one stab at being contempo was its surprise decision to give the score award to Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey ("Next to Normal") instead of Elton John ("Billy Elliot").

John, whose rock superstar days ended 20 years ago and is now best known as a Vegas lounge act, continues to be touted as a Broadway godsend even though his only first-rate tuner score is a recycled movie score, "The Lion King," from 15 years ago. His current "Billy Elliot" does offer up two genuine showstoppers: the act one "Angry Dance," which owes everything to Peter Darling's choreography and Michael Koch's percussive orchestration, and the act two "Dream Ballet" between the young Billy and his older self, set to Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake."

To conjure up a likeminded moment of creative auto-piloting, one would have to imagine Leonard Bernstein not writing "Dance at the Gym" and instead putting Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel" into "West Side Story."

Given Broadway's penchant for the past over the present, it's no surprise Liza Minnelli would beat out movie star/Broadway deb Will Ferrell in Tony's special-event category this year.

What remained truly mind-boggling was the Tony producers' decision not only to give Minnelli the plum presenter spot -- handing out the best musical award -- but having her cap the telecast's mob-scene opening number, in which she offered the best evidence why second acts (or, in her case, third or fourth acts) should be avoided: She had trouble belting out one of her signature tunes from 30 years ago, "And the World Goes 'Round."

It's not ageist to point out these failings. Legit legends like Angela Lansbury ("Blithe Spirit"), Charles Strouse (the Broadway-bound "Minsky's") and Arthur Laurents ("Gypsy") have shown that they're at the top of their game as they continue to work past their 80th birthdays. They are the personification of hopes that materialize as well as spring eternal.

Read the full article at:

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## THE FIRST WIVES CLUB Gets Featured In The LA Times And The San Diego Union Tribune

[Back to the Article](#)

by BWW News Desk



The world-premiere, Broadway-bound musical THE FIRST WIVES CLUB, currently in previews at The [Old Globe Theatre](#) in San

Diego, with an official opening set for July 31, 2009, is featured in the LA Times and the San Diego Union Tribune. Starring [Barbara Walsh](#), [Karen Ziemba](#), and [Sheryl Lee Ralph](#), THE FIRST WIVES CLUB is written by [Rupert Holmes](#), with music by legendary songwriting team [Brian Holland](#), [Lamont Dozier](#) and [Eddie Holland](#), and directed by award-winning opera and theatre director [Francesca Zambello](#).



The LA Times offers a behind-the-scenes feature on the creation of The First Wives Club:

"Reporting from San Diego -- Everybody here? This afternoon's run-through of the new musical "The First Wives Club" -- based on the 1996 movie and [Olivia Goldsmith's](#) 1992 novel -- is about to begin in a rehearsal room at San Diego's [Old Globe Theatre](#).

Everybody isn't. "Stop! Where is Karen?" demands director [Francesca Zambello](#), referring to Broadway veteran [Karen Ziemba](#), who portrays Annie, the perpetually apologetic "wife" played by [Diane Keaton](#) in the movie.

Continues Zambello dryly, "OK, things are going well . . ."

For the full LA Times article, click [here](#).

San Diego Union Tribune published a feature about the creative team of THE FIRST WIVES CLUB:

"Its composers are legends for their songs about love. Its director is represented on Broadway at the moment with a (literal) fairy-tale romance. Its writer is a multiple Tony-winner with a singular place in pop history for a tune about a beautiful reunion facilitated by a foofy cocktail."



For the full San Diego Union Tribune, article click [here](#).

[Barbara Walsh](#), [Karen Ziemba](#), and [Sheryl Lee](#) Ralph star in the world-premiere, Broadway-bound musical THE FIRST WIVES CLUB. Based on the best-selling novel and Hollywood blockbuster of the same name, THE FIRST WIVES CLUB features an updated book by multiple Tony® Award-winner [Rupert Holmes](#) (Curtains!, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Say Goodnight Gracie). World-famous Motown hit-makers and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees Holland-Dozier-Holland ([Brian Holland](#), [Lamont Dozier](#) and [Eddie Holland](#)) have reunited for one time only to create the score for THE FIRST WIVES CLUB. The production is directed by award-winning opera and theatrical director [Francesca Zambello](#) (The Little Mermaid for Disney on Broadway, Little House on the Prairie for the [Guthrie Theatre](#), Rebecca at the Vienna Raimund Theatre, Porgy and Bess at the Kennedy Center and the Wagner Ring Cycle at the San Francisco Opera).

The musical will be produced on Broadway by [Paul Lambert](#) and Jonas Neilson, with a theater and dates to be announced.

Tickets to THE FIRST WIVES CLUB are currently available by contacting the Globe Box Office at (619) 23-GLOBE or online at [www.TheOldGlobe.Org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.Org)

Photo by [Craig Schwartz](#)

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STAGE BY DON BRAUNAGEL

## Great White Pathway

ONE MAJOR BENEFIT OF OUR TOWN having two Tony-winning regional theaters, and sophisticated audiences, is the number of Broadway-hopeful shows that get a try-out here. Every year the Old Globe and La Jolla Playhouse (and sometimes other companies) schedule plays and musicals that producers hope will go on to New York and national praise — and profit.



This summer's potentially big tuner is *The First Wives Club*, coming to the Globe's main stage July 15–August 23. It's based on the same-named Olivia Goldsmith novel and hit 1996 film, about three women seeking revenge on their ex-husbands, and the Globe has assembled a socko creative team to put the comedy on stage. The score was composed by the songwriting trio who revved motors for Motown, Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland; the book is by Rupert Holmes; and the director is Francesca Zambello.

Rock and Roll Hall of Famers Holland, Dozier and Holland penned dozens of million-sellers for most of the artists on the Motown label, and some of those tunes, in revamped form, may show up in *First Wives*. Holmes, who had his own pop hits with "Escape (The Piña Colada Song)" and "Him," has become a Tony-winning playwright (book and score for *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*). And Zambello, who staged Disney's *The Little Mermaid* and is artistic adviser to San Francisco Opera, busily and eminently bounces internationally between the worlds of theater and opera.

THE MAJOR NONMUSICAL DEBUT is *Restoration*, at La Jolla Playhouse June 23–July 19. It's a Playhouse-commissioned work by Claudia Shear, noted for her 1994

solo performance work *Blown Sideways Through Life* and her 2000 Tony-nominated *Dirty Blonde*, an homage to Mae West that had a nifty run at the Globe in 2003.

Playhouse artistic director Christopher Ashley was impressed by Shear, whose acting experience includes being "fake Monica" on TV's *Friends*, when he directed *Blown Sideways*. An off-Broadway hit, the play was distilled from Shear's extensive work experiences, which include chef, nude model and brothel receptionist.

*Restoration*, directed by Ashley, concerns an art restorer who wins the task of sprucing up Michelangelo's *David* for its 500th-birthday celebration in Florence. Her seriocomic dealings with the statue's guardians, museum curators and tourists give her insight into the beauty and flaws in art — and herself.

MEANWHILE, THE GLOBE is hosting another world debut, until June 21. *Cornelia*, written by Mark Victor Olsen (co-creator of HBO's popular *Big Love*), is the story of Cornelia Wallace, who hoped to accompany husband George from the Alabama governor's mansion into the White House. Noted for his "segregation now, segregation forever" speech, he ran for president four times, even after a would-be assassin's bullet paralyzed him from the waist down.

Cornelia, a former beauty queen, married George in 1971 and divorced him in 1978, as he was becoming a born-again Christian and renouncing his segregationist views. Olsen's script covers that turbulent period, when Cornelia worked hard to support her husband and his political ambitions, then rebelled to promote her own.


Melinda Page Hamilton is playing Cornelia, and Robert Foxworth portrays George. Directing is Ethan McSweeney, who's helmed two excellent Globe productions: 2008's *In This Corner* and 2007's *A Body of Water*.

IN 2003, IN THE CORNER of a small Rolando strip mall, Sean Murray and Bill Schmidt opened Cygnet Theatre with an off-Broadway hit, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. That musical, concerning a rock singer who's bitter about a botched sex-change surgery and a bandmate who stole songs, excited critics and audiences here, propelling Cygnet to much success and a deserved reputation for quality productions. Then, in 2008, Cygnet took over management of the Old Town Theatre, planning a two-venue future.

The constricting economy, however, spurred Murray and Schmidt to focus on Old Town and not renew their lease on the Rolando theater, due to expire in July 2010. They hope to sublet the space, which they expanded and renovated, to another arts organization. As a farewell to the location and completion of an artistic arc, Cygnet reprises *Hedwig*, June 3–August 9. ■




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 Theater News

## Old Globe to Present World Premiere of *First Wives Club*

 EMAIL THIS

By: **Brian Scott Lipton** · Sep 5, 2008 · San Diego

The Old Globe Theatre will present the world premiere of the musical *The First Wives Club*, based on the 1996 film of the same



Francesca Zambello  
(© Joseph Marzullo/WENN)

name, July 15-August 23. No casting has been announced. The show is expected to eventually come to Broadway.

The production will be directed by Francesca Zambello, feature a book by Tony Award winner Rupert Holmes (based on the novel by Olivia Goldsmith and the film script by Robert Harting), and will have an original score by the legendary Motown team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland.

Zambello is currently represented on stage by the Broadway production of *The Little Mermaid* and the Guthrie Theater production of *Little House on the Prairie*. Her other credits include the Carnegie Hall concert production of *Showboat* and the musical *Rebecca*, which is expected to come to Broadway in 2010.

For more information, call 619-23-GLOBE or visit [www.oldglobe.org](http://www.oldglobe.org).

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FRIDAY  
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"The First Wives Club — A New Musical" was composed by (from left) Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland.

## Globe to be first to stage musical 'First Wives Club'

By James Hebert  
THEATER CRITIC

A new, Broadway-bound show about bad breakups is inspiring an auspicious musical reunion, and it has the Old Globe raising a toast to the theater's good fortune. (A piña colada, possibly.)

The Globe will play host next summer to "The First Wives Club — A New Musical," a world-premiere work based on the 1996 movie about a trio of vengeful ex-wives.

The show's score is by the legendary Holland-Dozier-Holland, the Motown songwriting and producing trio behind such '60s hits as the Supremes' "Stop! In the Name of Love," the Four Tops' "Reach Out I'll Be There" and Martha and the Vandellas' "(Love Is) Like a Heat Wave."

The three — Lamont Dozier and brothers Brian and Eddie Holland — have not worked together for decades, though

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## Summer run locally is set to start July 15

they were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990.

The show's writer is Rupert Holmes, a Tony winner whose stage credits include "The Mys-

tery of Edwin Drood" and "Curtains!," but who also holds a special place in pop-music history for writing and performing "Escape (The Piña Colada Song)," a No. 1 hit in 1979-80.

The versatile opera and theater veteran Francesca Zambello (Broadway's "The Little Mermaid") will direct the production, which runs at the Globe from July 15 to Aug. 23, 2009, before heading to Broadway.

"I think it's a great pairing of this strong, strong, writing

team, who are coming together for this Broadway show, and a veteran Broadway book-writer who knows the pop-song world very well," said Louis G. Spisto, the Globe's CEO/executive producer. "He can speak their language and give them the support they need as they build this new world for us.

"And Francesca Zambello is someone we've wanted to work with for quite a while. We've actually been talking to her about a number of projects. This was the first one that was a fit for us and worked timing-wise for her. (So) it's a tremendous team."

The 1996 film version, based on the novel by the late Olivia Goldsmith (with a script by Robert Harling), starred Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton as '60s-era college pals who discover 25 years later that they've all been

dumped by their husbands.

Though '60s tunes figured prominently in the movie's soundtrack, Spisto said the new musical's score will consist entirely of original songs.

"That's what's exciting about it; it's not going to be a compendium or a jukebox musical," he said. "They're writing songs to move the plot forward."

The Globe is partnering with commercial producers Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson on the show, which has been in the works for several years. Spisto characterized it as "certainly on the larger end" of musicals the Globe has staged, though he declined to specify its production budget.

It will join more than 20 other shows the Globe has sent to Broadway over the years, most recently last year's Tony-nominated musical "A Catered Affair."

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By WILLIAM SHAKESPEAREJuly 21, 2009  RSS

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## The Playbill® Collector's Frame

**First Wives Club – The Musical Convenes July 17 at Old Globe**
 By [Kenneth Jones](#)  
 17 Jul 2009


Broadway's Sheryl Lee Ralph, Barbara Walsh and Karen Ziemba sing new songs by the legendary team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland starting July 17 for the first preview of the new musical *The First Wives Club* in California.



The Old Globe in San Diego is producing the Broadway-aimed musical inspired by the novel and film of the same name. Francesca Zambello (*The Little Mermaid*, *Little House on the Prairie*) directs; the libretto is by Tony Award winner Rupert Holmes (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Curtains*, *Say Goodnight Gracie*). The world-premiere production officially opens July 31 and continues to Aug. 23 in San Diego.



The divas of the title may be jilted by their men, but they at least get to perform a brand-new score by Holland-Dozier-Holland, the threesome that created hits for Martha and The Vandellas, The Miracles, Marvin Gaye, The Four Tops and The Supremes. Their song catalog includes "(Love is Like a) Heat Wave," "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)," "Baby Love," "Stop! In the Name of Love" and "You Keep Me Hangin' On." The Motown hit-makers and Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame inductees disbanded in the 1970s but have

*The First Wives Club* stars Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and Sheryl Lee Ralph  
 photo by Craig Schwartz

reunited for the new musical comedy.

According to the Old Globe, "*The First Wives Club* is a funny, moving and

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empowering new musical based on the smash-hit movie comedy and Olivia Goldsmith's bestselling novel. Former college friends reunite at middle-age and soon discover they share the same unhappy story — their ungrateful husbands careened into midlife by dumping them for younger women. Inspired by their renewed friendship, the three women band together and take back their lives in style!"

Ralph received a Tony Award nomination for Best Actress in a Musical for the original Broadway production of *Dreamgirls* (she played Deena Jones). She also originated the role of Muzzy Van Hossmere in the Tony Award-winning musical, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

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Ralph, who replaced Adriane Lenox in the role of Elyse before rehearsals began, is joined onstage by Tony nominee Barbara Walsh (*Company*, *Big, Fatsettos*) as Brenda, Tony winner Karen Ziemba (*Contact*, *Curtains*) as Annie, Tony nominee John Dossett (*Gypsy*) as Aaron, Kevyn Morrow (*Dreamgirls*) as Bill, Tony nominee Brad Oscar (*The Producers*) as Morty, Sara Chase as Trophy Wife and Tony nominee Sam Harris (*The Life*) as Duane with Ari Lerner and Austyn Myers alternating as Jason. The cast also includes Michelle Aravena, Mark Campbell, Thursday Farrar, Jenifer Foote, Bob Gaynor, Matthew LaBanca, Victoria Matlock, Kat Palardy, Martin Samuel and Richard Waits.

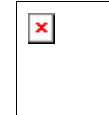
The popular 1996 Paramount film "The First Wives Club" was based on Olivia Goldsmith's novel and featured a screenplay by Robert Harling. The motion picture grossed over \$130 million and starred Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton.

Following its run at The Old Globe, *The First Wives Club* will be produced on Broadway by Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson, with a theatre and dates to be announced.

The creative team includes scenic designer Peter J. Davison (*Medea*, for which he was nominated for a 1994 Tony Award), costume designer Paul Tazewell (Tony nominee in 2008 for *In The Heights*, in 2006 for *The Color Purple* and in 1996 for *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*), lighting designer Mark McCullough, sound designer Jon Weston, choreographer Lisa Stevens, music supervisor Ron Melrose, conductor John Gentry Tennyson and orchestrator Harold Wheeler.

Tickets to *First Wives Club — The Musical* are currently available by contacting the Globe Box Office at (619) 23-GLOBE or online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org) or in person at the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

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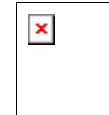
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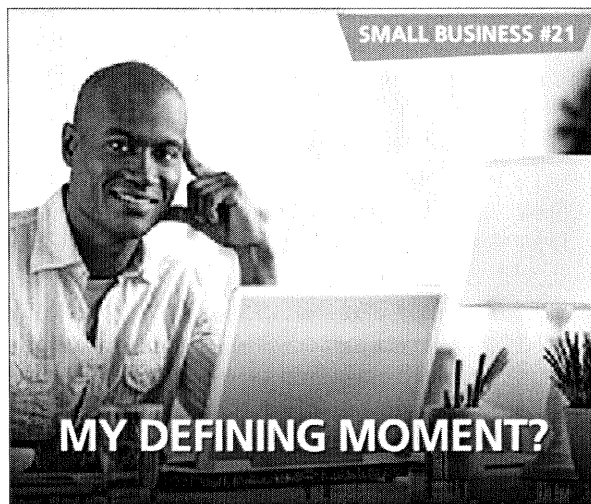


## Casting Announced For Broadway-Bound THE FIRST WIVES CLUB Musical

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by BWW News Desk

Old Globe Executive Producer Lou Spisto is pleased to announce the complete cast and design team for its world premiere of The First Wives Club - A New Musical, as part of the Globe's 2009 Summer Season. Based on the best-selling novel and film of the same name, this Broadway-bound musical features a book by Tony Award-winner Rupert Holmes (Curtains!, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Say Goodnight Gracie) and a score by Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, the threesome who created hits for Martha and The Vandellas, The Miracles, Marvin Gaye, The Four Tops and The Supremes. The production will be directed by award-winning opera and theatre director Francesca Zambello (The Little Mermaid, Little House on the Prairie - The Musical, Rebecca, Porgy and Bess and the Wagner Ring Cycle at the San Francisco Opera where she is the Artistic Advisor). The production will run in the Old Globe Theatre July 15 - August 23, 2009, with a press opening on Friday, July 31 at 8:00pm. Following its run at The Old Globe, The First Wives Club will be produced on Broadway by Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson, with a theatre and dates to be announced.



A world premiere, Broadway-Bound musical, The First Wives Club, is a funny, moving and empowering story based on the smash-hit movie comedy and Olivia Goldsmith's bestselling novel. Former college friends reunite at middle-age and soon discover they share the same unhappy story - their ungrateful husbands careened into midlife by dumping them for younger women. After drowning their sorrows, they decide to put their long dormant talents to use, band together, and stylishly, systematically and hilariously get even with their exes! With new music by Rock and Roll Hall of Fame legends, Holland-Dozier-Holland ("Stop! In the Name of Love," "It's The Same Old Song," "Baby Love," and many more), book by Tony Award-winner Rupert Holmes (The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Curtains!) and direction by Francesca Zambello (Disney on Broadway's The Little Mermaid, The Guthrie Theatre's Little House on The Prairie - The Musical), this glitzy new musical is destined to be the theatrical event of 2009!

Tickets are available immediately through subscription purchase. Individual tickets for The First Wives Club - A New Musical go on sale Sunday, June 7 at 10am and are available by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, on the Globe website at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org), or by visiting The Globe box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. Ticket prices range from \$55 to \$92.

The cast features Broadway veterans Karen Ziemba (Contact, Curtains) as "Annie," Adriane Lenox (Doubt; Kiss Me, Kate) as "Elyse," Barbara Walsh (Company, Hairspray) as "Brenda,"

John Dossett (Gypsy) as "Aaron," Kevyn Morrow (Dreamgirls) as "Bill," Brad Oscar (The Producers) as "Morty," Sara Chase as "Trophy Wife," Sam Harris (The Life) as "Duane," Ari Lerner and Austyn Myers alternating as "Jason," with Michelle Aravena, Mark Campbell, Thursday Farrar, Jenifer Foote, Bob Gaynor, Matthew Labanca, Victoria Matlock, Hayley Podschun, Martin Samuel and Richard Waits as The Ensemble.

The design team includes Scenic Designer Peter J. Davison (revival of Blithe Spirit in 2009, Is He Dead?, Deuce and Medea, for which he was nominated for a 1994 Tony Award), Costume Designer Paul Tazewell (2009 revival of Guys and Dolls, Tony Award Nominee in 2008 for In The Heights, in 2006 for The Color Purple and in 1996 for Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk), Lighting Designer Mark McCullough (The American Plan, 2000 revival of Jesus Christ Superstar), Sound Designer Jon Weston (13; 2006 revival of Les Miserables; The Color Purple; Caroline, or Change; Thoroughly Modern Millie), Choreographer Lisa Stevens, Music Supervisor Ron Melrose, Conductor John Gentry Tennyson and Orchestrator Harold Wheeler.



Tony-winning actor-singer-dancer Karen Ziemba ("Annie") is one of Broadway's most versatile and beloved performers. Karen received the Tony Award - along with the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle awards - starring in Susan Stroman and John Weidman's hit musical, Contact, at Lincoln Center Theater. On and Off-Broadway, Karen has played murderers and marathoners, a daughter of the West, to the daughter of an American president. She starred as "Roxie Hart" in Kander and Ebb's Chicago, and "Rita Racine" in their Steel Pier (for which she received her first Tony award nomination as well as Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle nominations), and starred in the new

Gershwin musical, Crazy For You. Karen Ziemba made her debut at the Globe earlier this year in John Guare's Six Degrees of Separation as "Ouisa."



Adriane Lenox ("Elyse") received the 2005 Tony Award for Doubt: A Parable, the Pulitzer Prize-winning play. She has also appeared as "Hattie" in the Broadway revival of Kiss Me, Kate; Caroline, or Change; Funny Girl and Dreamgirls. Adriane made her breakthrough through her Obie Award-winning performance in off-Broadway's Dinah Was. Her television credits include: "Lipstick Jungle," "Law & Order: SVU," "Third Watch" and "Law & Order."



Barbara Walsh ("Brenda") has appeared in several prominent Broadway productions. Walsh is best known for her Drama Desk Award-winning and Tony-nominated role as "Trina" in the Broadway production of Falsettos. She appeared on Broadway in the short-lived musical Big, based on the Penny Marshall film starring Tom Hanks. Recently, Ms. Walsh was in the 2007 Broadway revival of Stephen Sondheim's Company, playing the role of "Joanne." She has also appeared on Broadway in Rock 'n Roll! The First 5,000 Years, Nine, Blood Brothers, and Hairspray. She played the dual roles of "Edith Beale" and her daughter "Little Edie" in Grey Gardens at the Studio Theatre (Washington, DC) from November 12, 2008 through December 21, 2008. Walsh's television credits include guest roles on "Law & Order," "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," and the recurring role of Judy Schulman-Brown on "One Life to Live."

John Dossett ("Aaron") made his Broadway debut in 1979 in a short-lived musical entitled the King of Schnorrers. In 1982 he joined the cast of Fifth of July, after which the bulk of his work

was in off-Broadway productions and on television. He was a member of the off-Broadway Circle Repertory Company, performing in many plays between 1980-1994. He later achieved success in two popular musicals, *Ragtime* (1998) and the 2003 revival of *Gypsy*, opposite Bernadette Peters. His performance in the latter garnered him both Tony Award and Drama Desk Award nominations as Outstanding Featured Actor in a Musical. His most significant screen credit is the 1990 AIDS drama, *Longtime Companion*. He most recently was reunited with his *Gypsy* co-star Peters in a one-night only benefit reading of *Love Letters*.

Kevyn Morrow ("Bill") made his Broadway debut as a member of the original cast of *Leader of the Pack*, he soon after joined the cast of the legendary *A Chorus Line*. His next Broadway show would be as an original cast member of *Dreamgirls*. Kevyn has also appeared in *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, *Dream*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, and the 2002 revival of *Anything Goes*. He recently appeared in the premiere presentation of *Ripper*, the musical, at New World Stages.

Brad Oscar ("Morty") was nominated for the 2001 Tony Award for his role as Nazi playwright "Franz Liebkind" in *The Producers*. He has appeared in several productions at the *Arena Stage* in Washington, DC. In 2005, he played "The Devil" (Mr. Applegate) in *Damn Yankees*, and in October 2006 he played "Master of Ceremonies" in *Cabaret*. He has completed playing multiple roles, including "Lady Enid" in *The Mystery of Irma Vep* in 2008. Other regional work includes the title role in the musical *Barnum*, at the *Asolo Repertory Theatre* (Florida).

Sam Harris ("Duane") who's recent role on the CBS comedy, *"The Class"*, is the latest incarnation of a career that has spanned more than two decades, spanning from singer/songwriter to stage, film, television actor to writer and producer. Sam has starred in productions of *Cabaret*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and the self-penned shows *Different Hats* and, most notably, *Hard Copy*, in which he portrayed six different characters frequenting an all-night news stand. The show was a huge success, garnering myriad awards, and Sam's writing and acting skills were now coming to the forefront. He received a Drama Desk-nomination for his role in the *Tommy Tune* produced *Grease*. Immediately following, he toured for 15 months in the Broadway National tour of *Andrew Lloyd Webber's Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Soon after, Sam starred in *Cy Coleman's The Life*, for which he received the Drama League Award as well as Tony, Outer Critic's Circle and Drama Desk nominations.

One of America's most popular and prolific "pop" songwriting teams ever, the hits of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland (music & lyrics) have received over 100 million airplays on radio and television. Their songs have had an indelible influence on the international music scene and have been a part of the fabric of our lives for over four decades. Their body of work has been recorded by Rod Stewart, Michael Jackson, James Taylor, Marvin Gaye, The Dixie Chicks, The Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas, The Four Tops, The Isley Brothers, Freda Payne, The Carpenters, Barbra Streisand, Reba McEntire, The Temptations, Dionne Warwick, The Jackson Five and The Beatles to name just a few. Among the numerous hits penned by the team of Holland, Dozier and Holland, whose music has had more airplay than the Rolling Stones, Elvis and the Beatles combined, are "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved by You)," "Baby I Need Your Loving," "Stop! In the Name of Love," "You Can't Hurry Love" and "I Can't Help Myself." They were inducted in the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1988; into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990; they received the National Association of Recording Artists and Science Trustee Award and were recently honored with the BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc) "ICON" award.

Rupert Holmes (Book) is the author of numerous songs, musicals, plays and novels, which have earned him three Tony Awards (Best Book, Best Score and Best Musical), several Drama Desk Awards, and the prestigious Edgar Award, which was given to him by the Mystery Writers of America. He has developed and arranged songs for many renowned artists, including Barbra



Streisand, Dolly Parton, Barry Manilow, Paul Williams, the Manhattan Transfer and Barbara Cook. His Solitary, which starred Stacy Keach, set a new box office record at the Kennedy Center. Other notable theatrical projects include the Tony Award-Winning, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, the Tonymominated Say Goodnight Gracie, The Accomplice, Goosebumps and Marty. His latest show, Curtains!, a Kander and Ebb musical, recently played to major acclaim on Broadway. He also received an Emmy for his made-for-television dramedy, "Remember WENN," and more recently his novel, Where The Truth Lies, has been translated into a major motion picture starring Kevin Bacon.

Francesca Zambello (Director) is an internationally recognized and award-winning opera and theater director. Her recent theatrical credits include The Little Mermaid for Disney on Broadway, Little House on the Prairie for the Guthrie Theater, Rebecca for the Vienna Raimund Theater, West Side Story for the floating stage in Bergenz, Austria, and Showboat at The Royal Albert Hall. She is the Artistic Advisor of the San Francisco Opera where she is helming a new Ring Cycle and Porgy and Bess this season. She has many notable directing credits at the Metropolitan Opera, including An American Tragedy, Cyrano and Les Troyens, as well as at Teatro alla Scala, Royal Albert Hall, Bolshoi, Royal Opera House, Paris Opera, Washington Opera, and Chicago Lyric, among others. Her honors include three Olivier Awards, two Evening Standard Awards, two French Grand Prix des Critiques, Helpmann Award, Palme d'Or in Germany and the Golden Mask in Russia.

The popular 1996 Paramount film "The First Wives Club" - about three divorced women who seek revenge on their former husbands - was based on Olivia Goldsmith's novel and featured a screenplay by Robert Harling. The motion picture grossed over \$130 million and boasted a star-studded cast comprising Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton.

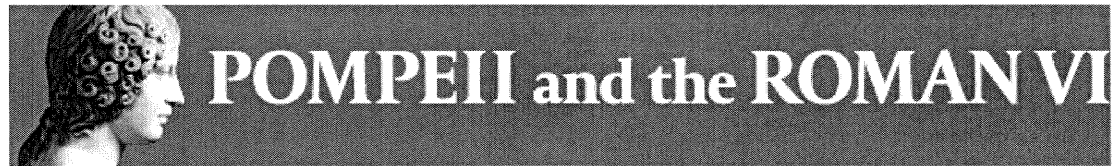
The musical will be produced on Broadway by Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson, with a theatre and dates to be announced.

Tickets to First Wives Club-The Musical are currently available by subscription by contacting the Globe Box Office at (619) 23-GLOBE or online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org).

The internationally-acclaimed, Tony Award® -winning Old Globe is one of the most renowned regional theatres in the country and has stood as San Diego's flagship arts institution for 74 years. The Old Globe produces a year-round season of 15 plays and musicals on its three stages, including its highly-regarded Shakespeare Festival. The Globe has become a gathering place for leading theatre artists from around the world, such as Tom Stoppard, Daniel Sullivan and Chita Rivera, among many others. Numerous Broadway-bound premieres and revivals, such as Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, The Full Monty and Damn Yankees, have been developed at The Old Globe and have gone on to enjoy highly successful runs in New York and at regional theatres across the country.

The Globe's 2009 Summer Season includes the renowned Summer Shakespeare Festival, featuring Coriolanus, Twelfth Night and Edmund Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac playing in repertory; world premiere musical The First Wives Club, by R&B legends Holland-Dozier-Holland; and Charles Ludlam's The Mystery of Irma Vep. Under the leadership of Executive Producer Louis G. Spisto and Resident Artistic Director Darko Tresnjak, the Globe is at the forefront of the nation's leading performing arts organizations, setting a standard for excellence in American theatre.

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### Tony-winning talent set for 'The First Wives Club'

12:35 PM, May 15, 2009



On the stiletto heels of "9 to 5: The Musical" comes the latest screen-to-stage girl-power revenge musical with Broadway aspirations. (Should we just call it a theatrical genre by now?)

"The First Wives Club" is currently taking shape at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, where the cast has just been announced. Tony winners Karen Ziemba and Adriane Lenox will be joined by Tony nominee Barbara Walsh to play the roles of three middle-aged women who seek revenge on their ex-husbands.



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play Annie, the role originated by Diane Keaton in the movie. Lenox, who won a Tony for "Doubt," will play Elyse, the part played by Goldie Hawn. Walsh, who was nominated for "Falsettos" in 1992, will take the part of Brenda, which was first played by Bette Midler.

Completing the cast are Tony winner John Dossett, Kevyn Morrow, Brad Oscar and Sam Harris.

The musical is adapted from the hit 1996 Paramount feature film, which itself was based on the novel by Olivia Goldsmith.

"The First Wives Club" musical features a book by Rupert Holmes and music by the Motown songwriter-producer team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland. Francesca Zambello ("The Little Mermaid") will direct. The production runs July 15 to Aug. 23 at the Old Globe Theatre.

-- David Ng

*Caption: Bette Midler, Diane Keaton and Goldie Hawn in the film version of "The First Wives Club." Credit: Andy Schwartz / Paramount*

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## Ziembra, Lenox and Walsh to Star in Old Globe's *First Wives Club*

By Andrew Gans  
15 May 2009



Barbara Walsh

Michelle Aravena, Mark Campbell, Thursday Farrar, Jenifer Foote, Bob Gaynor, Matthew LaBanca, Victoria Matlock, Hayley Podschun, Martin Samuel and Richard Waits.

*The First Wives Club — A New Musical*, according to press notes, "is a funny, moving and empowering story based on the smash-hit movie comedy and Olivia Goldsmith's bestselling novel. Former college friends reunite at middle-age and soon discover they share the same unhappy story - their ungrateful husbands careened into midlife by dumping them for younger women. After drowning their sorrows, they decide to put their long dormant talents to use, band together, and stylishly, systematically and hilariously get even with their exes!"

The design team includes scenic designer Peter J. Davison, costume designer Paul Tazewell, lighting designer Mark McCullough and sound designer Jon Weston. Choreographer is Lisa Stevens, music supervisor is Ron Melrose, conductor is John Gentry Tennyson, and orchestrator is Harold Wheeler.

*The First Wives Club* will be produced on Broadway by Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson, with a theatre and dates to be announced.

Tickets are available immediately for the Old Globe run through subscription purchase. Individual tickets go on sale June 7 at 10 AM by calling (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org).

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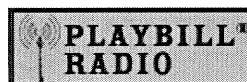
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**TM** Theater News

## John Dossett, Sam Harris, Adriane Lenox, Brad Oscar, Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba, et al. Set for Old Globe's *The First Wives Club*

By: **Brian Scott Lipton** · May 15, 2009 · San Diego

Full casting has been announced for the world premiere of the musical *The First Wives Club*, based on the 1996 film of the same name, to play a pre-Broadway engagement at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, July 15-August 23.

The production, which will open officially on July 31, will be directed by Francesca Zambello, with choreography by Lisa Stevens. It will feature a book by Tony Award winner Rupert Holmes (based on the novel by Olivia Goldsmith and the film script by Robert Harting), and will have an original score by the legendary Motown team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland.

The cast features Karen Ziemba as Annie, Adriane Lenox as Elyse, Barbara Walsh as Brenda, John Dossett as Aaron, Kevyn Morrow as Bill, Brad Oscar as Morty, Sara Chase as the Trophy Wife, and Sam Harris as Duane.

The cast also includes Ari Lerner, Austyn Myers, Michelle Aravena, Mark Campbell, Thursday Farrar, Jenifer Foote, Bob Gaynor, Matthew LaBanca, Victoria Matlock, Hayley Podschun, Martin Samuel, and Richard Waits.

The design team includes Peter J. Davison (sets), Paul Tazewell (costumes), Mark McCullough (lighting), Jon Weston (sound), Ron Melrose (music supervision), and Harold Wheeler (orchestrations).

For tickets and other information, call 619-23-GLOBE or visit [www.theoldglobe.org](http://www.theoldglobe.org).



Karen Ziemba  
(© Joseph Marzullo/WENN)

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# Globe's 'First Wives' nabs stage vets

**By James Hebert**  
THEATER CRITIC

The Old Globe is headed to the altar (theatrically speaking) with two Tony-winning actresses and several other Broadway veterans, topping the cast of the world-premiere show "The First Wives Club — A New Musical."

Adriane Lenox, who won the Tony in 2005 as best featured actress for "Doubt," will play Elyse in the Broadway-bound musical, which begins its Globe run July 15.

The work, based on the 1996 movie about a trio of slighted

ex-wives, has a score by the legendary Motown team Holland-Dozier-Holland and a book by Tony-winner Rupert Holmes. Francesca Zambello ("The Little Mermaid") directs.

Karen Ziemba, a 2000 Tony-winner as best featured actress for "Contact," plays Annie. Ziemba was at the Globe this year in John Guare's "Six Degrees of Separation."

Also joining the cast are the Broadway-seasoned performers Barbara Walsh ("Faretos") as Brenda, John Dossett (the 2003 "Gypsy") as Aaron, Kevyn Morrow ("Dreamgirls")

as Bill, Brad Oscar ("The Producers") as Morty and Sam Harris ("Grease") as Duane.

"The First Wives Club" is the first joint project in many years for Lamont Dozier and brothers Brian and Eddie Holland, who were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990. The songwriting-producing team was behind such '60s hits as the Supremes' "Stop! In the Name of Love"

and the Four Tops' "Reach Out I'll Be There."

"First Wives" tickets are available now to season subscribers; individual tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. June 7. For information or purchase, call (619) 234-5623 or go to [TheOldGlobe.org](http://TheOldGlobe.org).

Check out House Seats, James Hebert's new theater blog, under "Weblogs" at [sdsd.com](http://sdsd.com)

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## THE FIRST WIVES CLUB Extends at the Old Globe Thru 8/30

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by BWW News Desk



The First Wives Club - A New Musical will extend its run by an additional week due to popular demand. The Broadway-bound musical features a book by Tony Award winner Rupert Holmes and a score by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and



Eddie Holland. Directed by Francesca Zambello with choreography by Lisa Stevens and music direction by Ron Melrose, The First Wives Club will now run through Aug. 30.

The First Wives Club, originally set to end its run on Aug. 23, must close on Aug. 30 to accommodate the much-anticipated world premiere of Sammy, a new musical based on the life of Sammy Davis, Jr. with book, music and lyrics by two-time Oscar and Grammy winner Leslie Bricusse. Sammy will run in the Old Globe Theatre Sept. 19 - Nov. 8.

The First Wives Club is a funny, moving and empowering new musical based on the smash-hit movie comedy and Olivia Goldsmith's bestselling novel. Former college friends reunite at middle-age and soon discover they share the same unhappy story - their ungrateful husbands careened into midlife by dumping them for younger women. Inspired by their renewed friendship, the three women band together and take back their lives in style.

The cast features Broadway veterans Sheryl Lee Ralph (Dreamgirls, Thoroughly Modern Millie) as Elyse, Barbara Walsh (Company, Hairspray) as Brenda, Karen Ziemba (Contact, Curtains) as Annie, John Dossett (Gypsy) as Aaron, Kevyn Morrow (Dreamgirls) as Bill, Brad Oscar (The Producers) as Morty, Sara Chase as Trophy Wife and Sam Harris (The Life) as Duane.

The creative team includes Peter J. Davison (scenic design), Paul Tazewell (costume design), Mark McCullough (lighting design), Jon Weston (sound design), Harold Wheeler (orchestrator) and John Gentry Tennyson (conductor).

TICKETS to The First Wives Club can be purchased online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org), by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.



Performances began on July 17 and continue through Aug. 30. Ticket prices range from \$66 to \$92.

Performance times: Previews: Wednesday, July 29 at 7:00 p.m. and Thursday, July 30 at 8:00 p.m. Regular Performances: Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m., Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m., Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m., and Sunday evenings at 7:00 p.m. Discounts are available for full-time students, patrons 29 years of age and under, seniors and groups of 10 or more.

The Old Globe is located in San Diego's Balboa Park at 1363 Old Globe Way. There are numerous free parking lots available throughout the park. Valet parking is also available (\$10). For additional parking information visit [www.BalboaPark.org](http://www.BalboaPark.org).

CALENDAR: Shakespeare Festival: Twelfth Night, Cyrano de Bergerac and Coriolanus (in repertory thru 9/27), Summer Shakespeare Intensive: Pericles, The Prince of Tyre (8/17), Sammy (9/19-11/8), The Savannah Disputation (9/26-11/1), Whisper House (1/13-2/21).

The Tony Award-winning Old Globe is one of the country's leading professional regional theaters and has stood as San Diego's flagship arts institution for 74 years. Under the direction of Executive Producer Louis G. Spisto, The Old Globe produces a year-round season of 15 productions of classic, contemporary and new works on its three Balboa Park stages: the 580-seat Old Globe Theatre, the 250-seat Arena Stage at the San Diego Museum of Art's James S. Copley Auditorium (an interim second stage during construction of the new 280-seat Conrad Prebys Theatre Center) and the 612-seat outdoor Lowell Davies Festival Theatre, home of its internationally renowned Shakespeare Festival. More than 250,000 people attend Globe productions annually and participate in the theater's education programs and outreach services. Numerous Broadway-bound premieres and revivals, such as *The Full Monty*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *A Catered Affair*, and the annual holiday musical, *Dr. Seuss' How The Grinch Stole Christmas!*, have been developed at The Old Globe and have gone on to enjoy highly successful runs in New York and at regional theaters across the country.

Photo by Craig Schwartz

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## **Broadway-Aimed *First Wives Club* Gets Extra Week in San Diego**

By Kenneth Jones  
July 29, 2009

The world premiere run of *The First Wives Club – A New Musical* at The Old Globe in San Diego has been extended by one week to Aug. 30. The musical based on the film and novel of the same name officially opens July 31.

The Broadway-bound musical features a book by Tony Award winner Rupert Holmes and a score by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland. It's directed by Francesca Zambello with choreography by Lisa Stevens and music direction by Ron Melrose. Previews began July 17.

Tickets to *The First Wives Club* can be purchased online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org), by phone at (619) 23-GLOBE or by visiting the Globe's box office in Balboa Park in San Diego.

No Broadway dates have yet been announced for the show.

\*

*The First Wives Club*, originally set to end its run on Aug. 23, must close on Aug. 30 to accommodate the world premiere of *Sammy*, a new musical based on the life of Sammy Davis, Jr. with book, music and lyrics by two-time Oscar and Grammy winner Leslie Bricusse. *Sammy* will run in the Old Globe Theatre Sept. 19–Nov. 8.

According to The Old Globe, "*The First Wives Club* is a funny, moving and empowering new musical based on the smash-hit movie comedy and Olivia Goldsmith's bestselling novel. Former college friends reunite at middle-age and soon discover they share the same unhappy story — their ungrateful husbands careened into midlife by dumping them for younger women. Inspired by their renewed friendship, the three women band together and take back their lives in style."

The cast features Broadway veterans Sheryl Lee Ralph (*Dreamgirls*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*) as Elyse, Barbara Walsh (*Company*, *Hairspray*) as Brenda, Karen Ziemba (*Contact*, *Curtains*) as Annie, John Dossett (*Gypsy*) as Aaron, Kevyn Morrow (*Dreamgirls*) as Bill, Brad Oscar (*The Producers*) as Morty, Sara Chase as Trophy Wife and Sam Harris (*The Life*) as Duane.

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 Theater News

## Old Globe's *The First Wives Club* Extends Until August 30

By: [Brian Scott Lipton](#) · Jul 29, 2009 · San Diego

The world premiere of the musical [The First Wives Club](#), based on the 1996 film of the same name, has extended its pre-Broadway engagement at San Diego's [Old Globe Theatre](#) until August 30.

The production, which will open officially on July 31, will be directed by Francesca Zambello, with choreography by Lisa Stevens. It will feature a book by Tony Award winner Rupert Holmes (based on the novel by Olivia Goldsmith and the film script by Robert Harting), and will have an original score by the legendary Motown team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland.

As previously announced, the cast will feature Karen Ziemba as Annie, Barbara Walsh as Brenda, Sheryl Lee Ralph as Elyse, John Dossett as Aaron, Kevyn Morrow as Bill, Brad Oscar as Morty, Sara Chase as the Trophy Wife, and Sam Harris as Duane. The cast will also include Ari Lerner, Austyn Myers, Michelle Aravena, Mark Campbell, Thursday Farrar, Jenifer Foote, Bob Gaynor, Matthew LaBanca, Victoria Matlock, Hayley Podschun, Martin Samuel, and Richard Waits.

The design team includes Peter J. Davison (sets), Paul Tazewell (costumes), Mark McCullough (lighting), Jon Weston (sound), Ron Melrose (music supervision), and Harold Wheeler (orchestrations).

For tickets and other information, call 619-23-GLOBE or visit [www.theoldglobe.org](http://www.theoldglobe.org).



Sheryl Lee Ralph  
(© Joseph Marzullo/Retna)

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## Musical Version of *The First Wives Club* to Debut at the Old Globe

by Broadway.com Staff



PS - *The First Wives Club* - Brian Holland - Lamont Dozier - Eddie Holland

San Diego's Old Globe Theatre will host director Francesca Zambello's world premiere production of *The First Wives Club* next summer. The new musical, featuring a score by the legendary Motown songwriting team of Holland-Dozier-Holland and a book by Rupert Holmes, will run from July 15 to August 23, 2009.

Based on the 1996 feature film starring Bette Midler, Diane Keaton and Goldie Hawn, *The First Wives Club* tells the story of three spurned wives determined to get their revenge. No casting has been set.

Lamont Dozier and brothers Brian and Eddie Holland, who were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990, have not worked together for decades. The trio was behind

such '60s hits as the Supremes' "Stop! In the Name of Love," the Four Tops' "Reach Out I'll Be There" and Martha and the Vandellas' "(Love Is) Like a Heat Wave." Holmes, a Tony winner for *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, was most recently represented on Broadway by *Curtains* and had a number one hit for writing and performing "Escape (The Piña Colada Song)."

The Globe is partnering with commercial producers Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson on the show, according to a story in the *San Diego Times-Union*.

9/8/2008 - 13:21:00

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**Posted: Fri., Jul. 17, 2009, 3:05pm PT**

## **'Wives Club' gets Motown sound**

### **Holland, Dozier, Holland reteam for musical**

By [ROBERT HOFER](#)

Last fall, a Broadway producer not associated with "9 to 5" was hanging out in the plaza of the Music Center during the tuner's pre-Broadway tryouts at L.A.'s Ahmanson Theater. He'd seen the show early in its run and, for some reason, he was back to see it again. Maybe it had improved, he opined. But more likely, it had not improved *enough*, he added.

"It's the basic problem with so many of these musical comedies based on movies," said the producer. "The emotions aren't big enough to support the characters breaking into song."

Sure enough, "9 to 5" opened on Broadway six months later to unenthusiastic notices, and didn't get a Tony nom for best musical, having been pushed aside by (oh, the shame!) a jukebox musical that told the story of (oh, the greater shame!) heavy-metal rockers on the Sunset Strip.

If success breeds imitators, so it seems does failure. Next up at the legit bat is the Broadway-bound musical version of the 1996 film "The First Wives Club," ready to preem July 31, under the direction of Francesca Zambello at San Diego's Old Globe. Again, we have an attempt to "make sing" a beloved, if not exactly classic, screen comedy about the slapstick antics of three mature women on a revenge trip.

If there's an obvious difference in the two projects, it's in the shows' respective writer teams -- and therein lies "Club's" best hope. Where the "9 to 5" musical kept onboard its screenwriter, Patricia Resnick, and songwriter, Dolly Parton, who penned the film's title tune, "The First Wives Club" eschews the movie participants in favor of new creatives, including veteran book writer Rupert Holmes and the songwriting trio Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, a.k.a. Holland/Dozier/Holland of Motown fame, who have reteamed for the first time in more than 30 years.

When asked about the similarities between the two femme movie-to-stage tuners, Holmes gives a mock double take. "They made a musical out of '9 to 5'?" he asks. "That was the one with three women? Hey, guys, we've got to cancel our show!"

Holmes is only slightly more serious when he adds, "Triumvirates are popular. I also hear there's a 'Three Musketeers' out there."

At least one of the "Club" scribes harbors a healthy dose of skepticism about his tuner's source material. When offered the project four years ago, lyricist Eddie Holland told lead producer Paul Lambert that the 1996 film "lacks a certain sensitivity. It doesn't have enough of the emotional thing."

Although producers keep looking for the next big musical comedy, it's actually musical *romance* that drives most longrunning shows. The same is true of the pop charts.

Eddie Holland ought to know, since he's the one who wrote the words to "Baby Love," "Stop in the Name of Love" and "How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You" for, respectively, the Supremes and Marvin Gaye. For "Club," he and his two collaborators don't stint on love songs -- songs with titles like "My Heart Wants to Try One More Time," "Love for All Seasons" and "One Sweet Moment," which begins with the line "I never thought you'd leave me."

Where "9 to 5" is all about career, "Club" is all about women recovering from failed marriages and how at least one of them gets her man back. In some ways, it's as if those Motown girl groups had grown up and were holding a reunion. Says Dozier, "The lyrics of our songs were painful, but the music was optimistic, with a beat you could dance to."

And so it will be with "Club" onstage.

But are the emotions big enough for a Broadway musical? Holmes calls the characters' feelings "gut-wrenching, a complete shattering of one's self-esteem."

If "9 to 5" replicated the movie right down to Dabney Coleman's mustache and Dolly Parton's big breasts, "Club" pulls a theatrical sleight of hand with its source material by not only having "Dreamgirls" vet Sheryl Lee Ralph sub for Goldie Hawn (Karen Ziemba and Barbara Walsh are the other wives), but also triple-casting Sara Chase as each of the three husbands' respective girlfriend.

Or as Holmes explains it: "This musical is about people trying to pick up the ruin of their life. But it is also a comedy."

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OVER 2 DOZEN SHOWS



## LAST CHANCE: *Mermaid*, *Bacchae* and *First Wives*

By [Adam Hetrick](#)  
 25 Aug 2009

A mermaid flips her fins on Broadway for the last time, while a brutal demi-god and three wronged women get their final taste of sweet revenge.

Here's Playbill.com's weekly "Last Chance" reminder to catch Broadway, Off-Broadway and world-premiere productions before they close.

### Concluding Aug. 30

- ***The Little Mermaid*** (On Broadway at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre). Disney's stage adaptation of the beloved animated film features a score by Alan Menken and the late Howard Ashman, with new tunes from Menken and Glenn Slater. Francesca Zambello staged the undersea spectacle about a young mermaid who longs to be "where the people are." For tickets visit [Ticketmaster](#).
- ***The Bacchae*** (Off-Broadway at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park). JoAnne Akalaitis stages Eurpides' brutal tragedy for Shakespeare in the Park that features a score by Philip Glass. Jonathan Groff stars as Dionysus in a cast that also features André DeShields and Anthony Mackie. For free tickets head to Central Park or visit the Public's online ticketing lottery at [PublicTheater](#).
- ***The First Wives Club*** (World Premiere at the Old Globe in San Diego). Motown and pop team Holland-Dozier-Holland penned the score to the musical based on the hit 1996 movie and Olivia Goldsmith novel. Tony Award winner Karen Ziemba and Tony nominees Sheryl Lee Ralph and Barbara Walsh star as the wronged women who reclaim their place on top in the Broadway-aimed musical. For tickets visit [OldGlobe](#).

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OVER 2 DOZEN SHOWS



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## Great music permeates 'The First Wives Club'

BY DIANA SAENGER  
Contributor

Transformation of novels into movies and then as stage plays is common. From the novel to a hit movie in 1996, "The First Wives Club" is now a Broadway-bound musical currently in rehearsal at The Old Globe. The comedy about three wives who band together after being dumped by their husbands is brought to life by a musical extravaganza of original music. "The First Wives Club" runs July 17 through Aug. 23.

Brenda (Barbara Walsh), Annie (Karen Ziemba) and Elyse (Sheryl Lee Ralph), former college roommates who have just reunited, discover they have something in common. They've been dumped by their husbands for younger women.

"This is a story of empowerment," Ziemba said. "It resembles the movie and novel a little, but the book by Tony-winner Rupert Holmes is a bit darker. The big diva film star is now a pop diva singer much in the vein of Patti Bell, Aretha Franklin or Diana Ross."

Tony-winning actor-singer-dancer Ziemba ("Annie") is one of Broadway's most versatile performers, having starred in "Contact," "Crazy For You," as Roxie Hart in "Chicago," and recently in the Globe's "Six Degrees of Separation." She was drawn to this play by the opportunity to work with director Francesca Zambello, who is the artistic adviser at San Francisco Opera, has won three Olivier Awards and has credits at The Metropolitan Opera.

### 'The First Wives Club'

- July 17–Aug. 23
- The Old Globe
- 1363 Old Globe Way
- (619) 23-GLOBE
- [www.theoldglobe.org](http://www.theoldglobe.org)

"I loved the story, and it's nice to have stage roles for seasoned actresses," Ziemba said. "Francesca is very bright with wonderful conceptual ideas and has a great visual eye of how the show will look."

The male cast includes John Dossett, Kevyn Morrow, Brad Oscar, Sam Harris, Ari Lerner and Austyn Myers.

"To see a bunch of hot guys over 40 accompanying us on stage who still have stamina and are attractive is wonderful," Ziemba said.

At the heart of the play is the music with a score by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, who created hits for Martha and The Vandellas, The Miracles, Marvin Gaye, The Four Tops and The Supremes, and the orchestration by Harold Wheeler.

"The music is all original but with a Motown sound and that familiar Motown beat," Ziemba said. "It's so much fun, and those big ballads are so emotional."

Because the cast must sing, act and dance, the team of creative artists behind the scenes is essential to what is seen on stage. Ziemba is enamored by the group assembled for this production.

"We have an incredible



Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba and Sheryl Lee Ralph star in The Old Globe's world premiere musical of 'The First Wives Club.' CRAIG SCHWARTZ

set designer (Peter J. Davison, "Blithe Spirit") and costume designer (Paul Tazewell, "Guys and Dolls," "The Color Purple")," she said. "And the difference of going from a rehearsal room to a set being lit by designer Mark McCullough (revival of "Jesus Christ Superstar") creates a wonderful nuance in our performances. Working with these artists and choreographer Lisa Stevens is an incredible gathering of people with like minds."

Ziemba feels patrons will respond to several elements in "The First Wives Club," including the empowerment of friends helping one another and the music.

"It's about doing unto others and not blaming anyone," she said. "And with this music, you can't help but bebop in your seat. It just makes you feel good."





Karen Ziemba, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Barbara Walsh rehearse a song for the Old Globe's new musical, "The First Wives Club." Photo courtesy of Kat Woronowicz

## Broadway-bound 'Wives' musical debuts at Globe

By PAM KRAGEN  
pkragen@nctimes.com

Revenge has never tasted so sweet.

On Friday, the Old Globe will launch the world premiere of "The First Wives Club," a Broadway-bound musical with a dream team of Broadway veterans. Three years in development, the musical is based on the 1992 book by Olivia Goldsmith (and subsequent 1996 film starring Goldie Hawn, Bette Midler and Diane Keaton) about three middle-aged Manhattanites who plot revenge on their husbands, who've left them for younger women.

The musical features a book by three-time Tony winner Rupert Holmes ("Curtains," "The Mystery of Edwin Drood") and a new score by the songwriting trio of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, whose pop and R&B catalog has received more than 100 million radio and TV airplays. Although their songs have been recorded by everyone from Rod Stewart and Michael Jackson to the Dixie Chicks and the Carpenters, HDH (as they're nicknamed) are best known for their string of hits for the Supremes and other '60s Motown groups, including "You Can't Hurry Love" and "Baby I Need Your Loving."

Director Francesca Zambello said she was drawn to the piece because it has accessible themes that everyone can relate to.

"It's about family and how these divorced women better themselves through friendship," Zambello said during an open rehearsal at the Globe a few weeks ago. "These women bond ... and there's a real message of empowerment and rediscovery of their self-esteem."

In the "First Wives Club," Annie (a neurotic stay-at-home mom), Elyse (an aging actress) and Brenda (a Jewish single mom) are old college friends who've lost touch with each other until they reunite at the fu-

### "THE FIRST WIVES CLUB"

**WHEN** Opens Friday and runs through Aug. 23; showtimes, 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays

**WHERE** Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

**TICKETS** \$55-\$92

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www.oldglobe.org

neral of an old friend, Cynthia, who committed suicide after her husband left her for a younger woman. There, Annie, Elyse and Brenda realize that they've all suffered the same fate at the hands of their philandering husbands. Annie's husband, Aaron, has left her for his therapist but she still hopes for a reunion; Elyse's producer husband, Bill, is suing her for half her fortune; and Brenda helped build her husband Morty's appliance chain business, until he left her for the much-younger TV spokesmodel featured in his commercials. After the funeral, the women craft a plan (with their gay interior decorator friend, Duane) to regain both their dignity and their fortunes.

In bringing the project to the stage, Zambello said one major change was made to the story to give it a more modern context. The role of Elyse (played on film by Goldie Hawn) has been rewritten as a black character, who will be played in the Globe production by Sheryl Lee Ralph, a Tony nominee for "Dreamgirls," an original castmate of "Thoroughly Modern Millie" at La Jolla Playhouse, and stepmom "Dee" on TV's "Moesha." (Ralph replaced Adriane Lenox, Tony-winner for "Doubt," early in the rehearsal process when Lenox was forced to withdraw for health reasons.)

Bookwriter Holmes (a songwriter himself, with the catchy 1979 "Pina

See 'Wives,' Page 17

## 'Wives'

continued from Page 13

Colada" song to his credit) said the combination of the HDH score with the story about three women at midlife is potent because the songwriting trio's radio hits "were the kind of music these three women heard when they were growing up."

And because HDH were known for their harmony numbers (written for the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas and the Four Tops, among others), the Globe musical will feature a three-woman backup trio, who will not only sing doo-wop style harmonies, but will serve as a singing Greek chorus, who will offer lyrical counterpoint and commentary to the action occurring onstage, Holmes said.

During the open rehearsal, the cast ran through a series of numbers that mark critical points in the show.

"Ready for a Change," which occurs in the last 20 minutes of Act I, is a lively women's anthem where Annie, Elyse and Brenda bond over their shared goal of revenge.

The show's first-act closer is "My Heart Wants to Try One More Time," a ballad by Annie (played by Tony-winning "Contact" star Karen Ziemba) about how she's having second thoughts because she still loves her husband. Act II opens with "You're So Lucky," a comedy number sung by the three husbands (played by Brad Oscar, Kevyn Morrow and John Dossett), each crowing about their new relationships and sex lives with much-younger women (all three trophy wives are played by actress Sara Chase). And "Jump for Joy" is an ensemble dance number where the repressed Annie lets loose in a singles bar and rediscovers her sexy self.

The musical was still undergoing significant development over the past few weeks, and Zambello said many changes would probably be made to the script and score as it was fine-tuned for Globe audiences. After it finishes up its run here, Old Globe executive producer Lou Spisto said "The First Wives Club" will move on to Broadway. Although a theater has not been locked in for the show's Broadway debut, production money has been secured for at least a large portion of the Broadway production.



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## Globe debuts Broadway-bound 'First Wives Club' musical

By **PAM KRAGEN** - [pkragen@nctimes.com](mailto:pkragen@nctimes.com) | Wednesday, July 15, 2009 8:11 AM PDT ∞

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The musical features a book by three-time Tony winner Rupert Holmes ("Curtains," "The Mystery of Edwin Drood") and a new score by the songwriting trio of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, whose pop and R&B catalog has received more than 100 million radio and TV airplays. Although their songs have been recorded by everyone from Rod Stewart and Michael Jackson to the Dixie Chicks and the Carpenters, HDH (as they're nicknamed) are best known for their string of hits for the Supremes and other '60s Motown groups, including "You Can't Hurry Love" and "Baby I Need Your Loving."

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Karen Ziemba, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Barbara Walsh rehearse the song "Ready for a Change" in the new musical "The First Wives Club" at the Old Globe Theatre's rehearsal space. Photo courtesy of Kat Woronowicz.

In bringing the project to the stage, Zambello said one major change was made to the story to give it a more modern context. The role of Elyse (played on film by Goldie Hawn) has been rewritten as a black character, who will be played in the Globe production by Sheryl Lee Ralph, a Tony nominee for "Dreamgirls," an original castmate of "Thoroughly Modern Millie" at La Jolla Playhouse, and stepmom "Dee" on TV's "Moesha". (Ralph replaced Adriane Lenox, Tony-winner for "Doubt," early in the rehearsal process when Lenox was forced to withdraw for health reason.)

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"The First Wives Club --- a New Musical"

When: Opens Friday and runs through Aug. 23; showtimes, 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; 7 p.m. Sundays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays

Where: Old Globe Theatre, Balboa Park, San Diego

Tickets: \$55-\$92

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**Posted: Sun., Sep. 7, 2008, 2:01pm PT**

## **'First Wives' to debut on July 15**

### **Musical adaptation set for Old Globe**

By **DAVID ROONEY**

The musical adaptation of 1996 menopausal revenge caper “The First Wives Club” will have its debut engagement July 15 through Aug. 23 at San Diego’s Old Globe prior to a planned Broadway run during the 2009-10 season.

While the Paramount movie prominently featured the Leslie Gore/Dusty Springfield hit “You Don’t Own Me” as the anthem for the trio of wronged spouses plotting to turn the tables on their errant husbands, the show will have an entirely original score by legendary Motown hit factory Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland.

Book is by Rupert Holmes (“Curtains”), adapted from Olivia Goldsmith’s novel and Robert Harling’s screenplay, with Francesca Zambello (“The Little Mermaid”) directing. The Old Globe will partner with commercial producers Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson on the project.

Read the full article at:

<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117991786.html>

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## Wedded Blisters: *First Wives Club*, With Ralph, Walsh and Ziemba, Opens at Old Globe

By [Kenneth Jones](#)  
31 Jul 2009



*The First Wives Club*  
photo by Craig Schwartz

They brood, they bend, they break, they bond — and they sing. These are the rituals of members of *The First Wives Club — The Musical*, opening in its world premiere July 31 in San Diego, CA.

The Broadway-aimed musical about three women mistreated by their men pulses to an original score by Motown and pop team Holland-Dozier-Holland, and features Tony Award winner Karen Ziemba and Tony nominees Sheryl Lee Ralph and Barbara Walsh.

The Old Globe in San Diego is producing the musical inspired by the Olivia Goldsmith novel and hit film of the same name. Francesca Zambello (*The Little Mermaid*, *Little House on the Prairie*) directs; the libretto is by Tony Award winner Rupert Holmes (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Curtains*, *Say Goodnight*

*Gracie*). Previews began July 17. The run was recently extended by one week. It will close Aug. 30.

The legendary songwriting team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland created hits for Martha and The Vandellas, The Miracles, Marvin Gaye, The Four Tops and The Supremes. Their song catalog includes "(Love is Like a) Heat Wave," "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)," "Baby Love," "Stop! In the Name of Love" and "You Keep Me Hangin' On." The Motown hit-makers and Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame inductees disbanded in the 1970s but have reunited for the new musical comedy.

According to the Old Globe, "*The First Wives Club* is a funny, moving and empowering new musical based on the smash-hit movie comedy and Olivia Goldsmith's bestselling novel. Former college friends reunite at middle-age and soon discover they share the same unhappy story — their ungrateful husbands careened into midlife by dumping them for younger women.

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Ralph received a Tony Award nomination for Best Actress in a Musical for the original Broadway production of *Dreamgirls* (she played Deena Jones). She also originated the role of Muzzy Van Hossmere in the Tony Award-winning musical, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. She's joined onstage by Tony nominee Barbara Walsh (*Company*, *Big*, *Falsettos*) as Brenda, Tony winner Karen Ziemba (*Contact*, *Curtains*) as Annie, Tony nominee John Dossett (*Gypsy*) as Aaron, Kevyn Morrow (*Dreamgirls*) as Bill, Tony nominee Brad Oscar (*The Producers*) as Morty, Sara Chase as Trophy Wife and Tony nominee Sam Harris (*The Life*) as Duane with Ari Lerner and Austyn Myers alternating as Jason. The cast also includes Michelle Aravena, Mark Campbell, Thursday Farrar, Jenifer Foote, Bob Gaynor, Matthew LaBanca, Victoria Matlock, Kat Palardy, Martin Samuel and Richard Waits.

\*

The popular 1996 Paramount film "The First Wives Club" was based on Goldsmith's novel and featured a screenplay by Robert Harling. The motion picture grossed over \$130 million and starred Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton.

Following its run at The Old Globe, *The First Wives Club* will be produced on Broadway by Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson, with a theatre and dates to be announced.

The creative team for the musical includes scenic designer Peter J. Davison (*Medea*, for which he was nominated for a 1994 Tony Award), costume designer Paul Tazewell (Tony nominee in 2008 for *In The Heights*, in 2006 for *The Color Purple* and in 1996 for *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*), lighting designer Mark McCullough, sound designer Jon Weston, choreographer Lisa Stevens, music supervisor Ron Melrose, conductor John Gentry Tennyson and orchestrator Harold Wheeler.

Tickets to *First Wives Club — The Musical* are currently available by contacting the Globe Box Office at (619) 23-GLOBE or online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org) or in person at the box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park.

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*The First Wives Club* stars Barbara Walsh, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Karen Ziemba  
photo by Craig Schwartz



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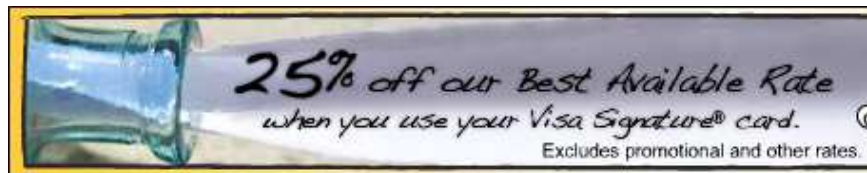
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# HOUSE SEATS BY JAMES HEBERT

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## "Escape" artist

By James Hebert

July 25, 2009, 4:21 p.m.

For my piece in tomorrow's Arts section about the new Old Globe musical "The First Wives Club," I was pleased to get a chance to interview the show's writer, Rupert Holmes.

So naturally, I spent half the interview geeking out over Holmes-iana that has little or nothing to do with "The First Wives Club."

Can you blame me? The man had a pop-culture moment for the ages 30 years ago with that irresistible [cheeseball of a song](#), "Escape" -- better known as "The Pina Colada Song." And yet he's also the mind behind scads of other creative works, from Tony-winning Broadway shows to mystery novels to TV shows and movies (In fact, Holmes was a sought-after music man long before "Pina Colada" was on everyone's lips.)

On top of all that, he's a funny, friendly and very down-to-earth guy. In fact, he just might be the entertainment world's answer to Ginsu knives ("And there's more ...!")

Here's the "more" -- some of it, anyway. Let's call this ...

### 10 THINGS YOU (QUITE POSSIBLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT RUPERT HOLMES\*

1. He produced hit records for a number of British bands ([the Strawbs](#) among them) in the '70s -- for the sole reason that he wanted to catch the entire season of plays in London's West End. (One such job -- for a song that went to No. 1 -- was timed specifically so that he could catch all three parts of Alan Ayckbourn's "The Norman Conquests.")

2. The 1975 Barbra Streisand album "Lazy Afternoon" -- which Holmes arranged and conducted -- includes the song "Shake Me Wake Me (When It's Over)," originally a hit for the Four Tops in 1966. It was written by Holland/Dozier/Holland -- who would reunite decades later to write the score for "The First Wives Club."

3. The lyric "If you like pina coladas" originally went, "If you like Humphrey Bogart ..." Holmes changed the line five minutes before the recording session because he feared there were already too many movie references

U-T theater critic James Hebert covers the drama, comedy and backstage buzz of San Diego's theater scene.

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in songs from his previous four albums.

4. "Escape" began life as a different song called "People Need Other People," but Holmes had to entirely rework the track (looping the one usable section by hand) because the drummer passed out after the first take "from having too much fun prior to the session."

5. The song, which was the last No. 1 hit of the '70s (and regained the top spot early in 1980), shows up in at least one movie a year (not to mention [commercials](#)), and was an actual plot point in an episode of the TV series "Las Vegas" (it was played as a signaling device by card cheats).

6. "Rupert Holmes" is an assumed identity. His real name is [Keyser Soze](#).

7. That last one isn't true, so it doesn't count against our 10. (Neither does this.)

6. Pina coladas are not the weirdest song subject Holmes ever indulged in. His song "[Timothy](#)," which hit No. 17 for The Buoys in 1971, is about cannibalism.

7. Holmes is an obsessive observer of cinematic arcanæ. He observes (for example) that the birds seen flying across a picnic scene in "Citizen Kane" are the same ones that appeared earlier in "King Kong." (The archival footage was reused for "Kane" using a matte technique, he theorizes.)

8. The opera influences in "[The Mystery of Edwin Drood](#)" -- the 1985 musical that earned Holmes the Tony Awards for both book and score -- came largely from Holmes' hearing opera wafting from his brother's bedroom when they were growing up. Richard Holmes is now a renowned baritone who has performed frequently at the Met.

9. Holmes landed "Edwin Drood" in Joseph Papp's esteemed Shakespeare in the Park festival by performing the entire musical by himself for Papp in the Public Theater founder's office.

10. He may or may not like pina coladas, but he has come to appreciate the song's legacy -- or at least has developed "a kind of chagrined affection" for it.

*\*(Barring the unlikely event your name is in fact Rupert Holmes)*

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## Sam I Am

Prepare to cry...and think...but, mostly, to laugh: Sam Harris on his journey to 'First Wives Club'

BY BRIAN VAN DE MARK, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Published Thursday, 13-Aug-2009 in [issue 1129](#)

Sam Harris is a funny man. In fact, it's Harris' mission on this planet to make people laugh. For anyone who needs proof of his uncanny ability to do so, an evening at the Old Globe's *First Wives Club* will give more than a glimpse into the genius that has made Harris a hit in the studio, in concert, on Broadway and on television. But for deeper understanding of the man behind the smiles, the laughs and the gags, we went backstage with him to talk about his journey and the whole experience that is "SAM."



**Gay & Lesbian Times:** Let's start at the beginning. With all of the drama around "American Idol," and your involvement with the first season of 'Star Search,' can you compare or contrast that with what some of the young people are going through today?

**Sam Harris:** Oh, God, yes, there are so many similarities. The first year of "Star Search" that I did was like what this last season of "American Idol" was. It was 30 million people a week, and it was crazy. It was intense. Most shows don't get these kinds of numbers because there are so many more channels and so much more cable. And so, we had the same the kind of numbers in that first year, and so I totally understand that experience of what going from mere anonymity to a house-hold name in the matter of one television season. America loves a contest. And we love the American dream and we love to get behind somebody and push for them. And I think also this year – and I've really never watched the show to be honest with you. I've known about it, and I've known some people who have come from it, but this year I watched because every 15 seconds someone would say, "Oh, my God, Adam Lambert reminds me of you." There were, like, 10,000 blogs on Sam Harris and Adam Lambert. So I started watching it and I had met Adam a few years ago and he was just amazing and I thought he was so dynamic, had an incredible instrument and he said to me at the time that I was quite an influence and I think that is because when you are a young man with that kind of range, and there aren't that many, you know there are few people you can look at and say, what are they doing and how did they do it? And what are they doing with it. I was thrilled. I think he's fantastic. I think he's the real deal and it's because of that voice and the way he uses it but it is also because he thinks about what he is saying. He's not one of those singers that goes out there and uses a bunch of vocal tricks. He actually thinks about the content and the lyric and what it means to him and I think that's what makes a real artist.

**GLT:** I agree. I think there is a sense of authenticity.

**SH:** Absolutely. He's the real thing. He's not bullshitting you. And also, and I think the comparison was not only in our vocal ranges and arrangements, I think that we had similar takes on songs. He would take something and reinvent it in a way that I like to do. There is also a theatricality to Adam Lambert that I certainly have, so I was thrilled by the comparison, and it's nice, having been in this business long enough to actually, feel that influence, it's very flattering.

**GLT:** The song you released that you released last year, "War on War," can you tell me a little about that?

**SH:** Well, obviously it was an anti-war song inspired by my discontent and anger at [the Bush] administration and what had been going on, and my brother and I wrote it. We did a video contest on YouTube. People submitted all these amazing videos. Some of them were original, some of them were acted out, some of them were montages, some of them were clips from different things, but all of them had a different voice and a different perspective. It was a really amazing experience for me to provide the music for other people's visual vision. And it became a nice

phenomenon. And then I got all these friends of mine, everybody from Liza Minelli to Kat Stevens (SP) to Steven Weber to Cindi Lauper, to vote on the videos and choose a winner. It was a lot of fun. I mean, it's a whole new world now with the Internet, and the way it opens the door for creativity. It's thrilling.

**GLT: Speaking of Steven Weber, I did see you in *Hair* with Weber and Marissa Jaret Winokur in Los Angeles.**

**SH:** Oh, you did? It was such a great production.

**GLT: I was disappointed that it didn't go onto Broadway. And as a side note, it was way better than the current Broadway production. Anyway, I remember it was at this small theater.**

**SH:** We actually did it at a theater on the Veteran Administration's ground, which was sort of ironic given many of the people who go there were Vietnam vets. I haven't seen the current production, but I remember the one that we did was very, very powerful and beautifully done in a very artful and political way. I was pleased with the way it was done. And it was going to at one point go to Broadway, and there was a lot of stuff I think with the authors or something, but I will tell you something, Brian, it was a Godsend, because that was the summer of 2001, and, the Fall of 2001 is when we were suppose to go to New York, and then September 11. Had this show gone to Broadway as an anti-government, anti-nationalism, anti-war statement in the midst of all of that flag waving, and let's kill the enemy, it would have died a dismal, horrible death. It would have been wrong. Now, two years later, it would have been giant. I thought, actually, that this production came up quite late.

**GLT: My favorite piece that I have seen you in, though, was *The Life*.**

**SH:** Oh, thank you. It was a really, really great company, and it was Cy Coleman and it was exciting and I loved that show and that cast, in particular. And I got to sing Cy Coleman songs that had never been heard. And I loved playing a villain. I typically don't play that. I typically play the good guy, so it was really, really fun to investigate that whole other thing. Plus, it was so exciting to just walk out on stage where there is no overture and start talking to the audience and then sing a big show-stopper. It's just thrilling.

**GLT: Speaking of the more playful side, on CBS' "The Class," you played Perry Pearl, who, for lack of a better phrase was a pretty effeminate gay. There were a lot of people who were pretty critical of the role because it didn't portray gay people in a good way, etc.**

**SH:** Well, remember, he wasn't gay.

**GLT: Exactly! I would remind people that you are from Oklahoma. It actually played well with folks in the Midwest. It was humor was they understood, and it took them a little step closer to being aware.**

**It is my single mission in life to make someone else laugh. I am a laugh whore. I will do practically anything to make you laugh. And I also think that through laughing, we let down our guard, and we are able to be available for other things, for relatability. It's through laughing that we become equal, so that we can see**

**SH:** Not only that, but how many people do we know who are actually like that? And I thought actually, yes, I can see, and I gave that a big thumbs up because the joke was on them. Yeah, the joke was on them! This was someone playing a character who was clearly, or at least probably, gay but chose this life and this family over it. It was like Corky St. Clair in "Waiting for Guffman." And so, it was a comment on all those people who make that choice, and, well, I just loved playing that character.

**GLT: And with the sock puppy birthday scene! It was off the charts.**

**SH:** I enjoyed that so much. I laughed so hard, when they let me do that, and that our child's name was Oprah and that her middle name we came to learn was Liza. And I called Liza and said, "You're gonna love this, this is a scream!" She actually flew out for the last episode and came on the set being taped, and she said she loved the show so

**our sameness.**

much.

**GLT: Do we need to laugh at ourselves more?**

**SH:** Oh, my God, it is how we survive. I think everything is funny. I am also a pretty mush pot, and cry at the drop of a hat, but I think everything is funny. And, we have to laugh at ourselves. Otherwise it is just way too depressing. I have to be around people who make me laugh. It is my single mission in life to make someone else laugh. I am a laugh whore. I will do practically anything to make you laugh. And I also think that through laughing, we let down our guard, and we are able to be available for other things, for relatability. It's through laughing that we become equal, so that we can see our sameness. That's why I love the theater so much. When people have that common experience, when they laugh, and they cry, and they think in the theater in a room with strangers, that's a powerful thing.

**GLT: Speaking of powerful changes in your life, you had 10 years of support from [your now husband] Danny [Jacobson] from the time that you met to the time you became sober. That's a real tribute to him.**

**SH:** That's right, and you're telling me! Actually, it was nine years, but it probably seemed like 20.

**GLT: And then, was there this epiphany to adopt?**

**SH:** Oh, it was no epiphany. It was there forever. I wanted it. It wasn't a good idea until I got sober. I think this is typical in any relationship – straight or gay – that one of the two is more ready than the other before the other. Unless one happens to get pregnant, which, well, wasn't going to happen to us. I was campaigning for this. I needed it. I wanted it. I realized how important it was. Danny was terrified. He was afraid it would change our lives. He was afraid it would restrict us. It would inhibit our careers. Meanwhile, now we have this baby, and [Danny] is the most incredible dad. It's our life. It's the center of everything. I had no idea that I could love this much.

**GLT: One of the comments that you made that I found really powerful was that you and Danny fell more in love with each other than ever when Cooper came into your life.**

**SH:** All of a sudden, you have this partnership, where the purpose becomes so much larger that you are talking about a person that you bring into the world where your job, from the moment they're born, is to prepare them to leave you. Is to prepare them to go be a good citizen. I think when you have two fathers, or two mothers, or an interracial marriage, or anything that is considered non-traditional, then the stakes become higher for that good citizen. They have to represent something else, because it's not their choice to do that. And Cooper. Sorry, Brian, I haven't seen him in five days, so I'm getting weepy. My heart is so large. It makes me be so much better than I thought I could be.

**GLT: While we are on the weepy part, you were heavily involved with the Michael Jackson 30th anniversary concert in 2001. How did his recent passing affect you?**

**SH:** Oh, well, I find it so sad, and part of that sadness is the predictability of it, in a way. This is someone I didn't know well, but I had met a half a dozen times, and the first time I met him was in the mid '80s when he had asked to meet me, which was so thrilling to me. I met Michael Jackson and Rosa Parks on the same day, so I was like, this is a big day for Sam Harris. And, he was kind of normal then. He was available. There was eye contact. It was so sweet and genuinely excited and present. And then over the years, I met him a half a dozen times and every time there was little less presence. And a little more strangeness and the wall was up a little more. There was this disconnection, and it was just sad. And, there's all this trash coming out, and it's probably mostly true. As a father now, it breaks my heart mostly for the children. This is a man who was so psychologically fucked up and of course so supported by yes people who just wanted to be in the train wreck. They want to be in it. Listen, as a sober man, I don't blame, I don't blame anyone around the sick person, because they're sick, too. It's our single responsible to take care of ourselves, to get help, and take care of our children. I am not one of those people who says everybody led him astray and they should have done this and he should have done that. He's responsible. Ultimately, addiction is the ultimate selfishness. And whether that is addiction to drugs or alcohol or plastic surgery or attention or just narcissism, it's just selfishness. And that's what he suffered from. He suffered from the disease of selfishness. And it breaks my heart because he was a great, great entertainer and contributed so much to not only



show business but to people's enjoyment and awareness and color barriers, and I think it's very, very sad. But I hope it's a lesson.

And every time we frickin' find out about someone – Billy Mays now, that it's cocaine, and someone said, "Oh, that is so sad for his family." And I said, "No, we need to know this! We need to know that this, whatever he was, 48-year old man, didn't just drop dead, that he – it's self-inflicted. It always it. I shouldn't say always. But it usually is, and I think we need to know that. These aren't just things that happen. They are things that happen because we chose them.

**GLT:** Now, let's touch for a minute on your current show *First Wives Club*, because I think it's pure genius, but I'm biased.

**SH:** Yeah, well, let's talk about that. The reviews have been an occasional rave, mostly mixed, and several dreadful. We're a work in progress. I think there's a great show here. I am experiencing incredible audiences every performance, screaming with laughter, and singing the songs on the way out of the theater. Are there problems? Absolutely. Is this a first-run, original show out of town? It is. I think there's a lot of things that can be fixed, and it's a great show. And once again, I look at every experience I have, and I am working with these wonderful veteran actors. I think every single one of who is a principal in the show has been either nominated or has won a Tony. These are wonderful people I get to play with on the stage and learn from and experiment with, and I am having so much fun. And, really, for the last year and half, I have been at home being a dad, doing an occasional concert or an episode. So to be in the room, or the theatre, or the dressing room or on the stage with these inventive, hysterical and wonderful brilliant people is really valuable to me. So, will the show go on? We shall see. I hope it does. I think it has a lot of great potential. But it's a process, man. My friend Frank Langella, who is one of my dearest friends, who has a career that I just admire so much, he talked about the roller coaster of the career in show business. And it's not just any single element. It's a library of work. It's the up and the down. It's the experience of the entire spectrum. Not a moment. Not a single show or movie or record. It's the culmination of the whole experience that makes an artist and gives you a career.

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Aug 13, 2009 9:14 PM

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## Two whole new roles for Tulsan Sam Harris



Barbra Walsh as Brenda (left), Sam Harris as Duane (center) perform in the world premiere of "The First Wives Club," which officially opened Friday at The Old Globe in San Diego. Craig Schwartz

By JAMES D. WATTS JR. World Scene  
Writer  
Published: 8/2/2009 2:24 AM  
Last Modified: 8/2/2009 5:12 AM

In all the shows that Sam Harris has done in his career — from solo concerts to Broadway musicals, films to TV comedies — one thing that hasn't weighed too heavily on his mind is teeth.

That has changed as the Oklahoma native prepared for the musical "The First Wives' Club."

The musical — based on the novel by Olivia Goldsmith and the 1996 movie it inspired that starred Bette Midler, Diane Keaton and Goldie Hawn — officially opened Friday at San Diego's Old Globe

Theatre (if things go well, the hope is for the show to move to Broadway in the spring of 2010).

The production features a high-caliber lineup of creative talents. Rupert Holmes, a Tony-, Grammy- and Edgar-winning songwriter and playwright, wrote the show's book. Motown's legendary songwriting team of Holland-Dozier-Holland created the original score, and Francesca Zamballo, whose credits include Broadway's "The Little Mermaid" as well as the original production of the opera "The Little Prince," is directing.

When Harris called last week to talk about the show, he and the cast were about to begin the final punishing week of the musical theater process — intensive rehearsals of the show all day long, and preview performances each evening.

"And naturally," he said, with a kind of exhausted chuckle, "this is the time that Cooper has started teething."

Cooper is Harris' year-old son, and the emergence of the tyke's molars is making for more than a few sleepless nights for his parents.

"This show is the first thing I've done since Cooper's been born that's been a daily, long-term project," Harris said. "And let me tell you, it's a whole new world when you have a kid."

It's also a whole new role for Harris in "The First Wives Club" in that his character, Duane, was one created for the musical.

Duane is the best friend of Brenda (played in the movie by Bette Midler, in the musical by Barbara Walsh) who becomes the chief co-conspirator in the efforts of Brenda and her two friends to win back husbands who have left them for younger women.

"In the course of the show, my character plays these other characters who help perpetuate these ruses," Harris said. "I play a gangster called Uncle Carmine and this high-fashion designer named Duarte, who's this outrageous Eurotrash sort of character. So I'm a character playing a character in most scenes, which makes this part so much fun to do."

Harris has a couple of big numbers — "A Man Like Me," in which his character tries to convince his friend Brenda of the sort of man she should have, and a production number featuring Duarte.

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"It's like this mini-farce, with people hiding behind doors and furniture, and me doing this larger-than-life character," he said. "It's my real workout of a number — that song is like jumping on a treadmill that's going full speed. But it's a blast."

The rest of the cast includes Tony Award-winner Karen Ziemba in the role played by Diane Keaton in the film, and Tony nominee Sheryl Lee Ralph in the role originally played onscreen by Goldie Hawn.

Harris said that while the musical version of "The First Wives' Club" has a cinematic look to it — there are a total 30 set changes in the two-act show — it also takes great advantage of the conventions of live theater.

"We're singing all the time, that's one thing," he said. "But one of the really genius things that Rupert Holmes and the creative team came up with is to have all the young girlfriends of the husbands be played by the same actress. She has a different look and voice for each one — we've had some people not realize that it's the same actress in all three roles.

"But doing that is also a metaphor for the fact that, underneath it all, there's nothing different about the women these middle-aged men are trying to pursue," Harris said. "They're really all the same."

"The First Wives' Club" will run through Aug. 23 in San Diego. While the producers want to bring the show to Broadway, there's no guarantee that it will make it to the Great White Way.

But the gap between the final shows of "The First Wives' Club" and its potential Broadway run will give Harris the chance to do some concert work — such as the shows he will present Oct. 30-31 as a guest of the Signature Symphony at Tulsa Community College.

**James D. Watts Jr. 581-8478**  
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By JAMES D. WATTS JR. World Scene Writer

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## Sam Harris at the Old Globe

by: Big Mike | August 18th, 2009

Tonight when I went to work at Jimmy Carters Mexican Cafe, I had the privilege to wait on a very pleasant gentleman and his niece who was visiting her uncle here in San Diego. In talking briefly with this gentleman I had realize I was speaking with Sam Harris. I found him to be very humble, polite and very approachable with others. It's always so nice when you met people of fame and success to be who they truly are. ONE OF US. Sam is here starting in The First Wives Clubs, at the Old Globe Theatre in Balboa Park. So if you haven't seen this very delightful, fun and charming play, I suggest you get tickets and go see it. Rumor has it a very famous Super Star will be flying in from New York City that just so happens to be a dear and great friend of Sam's will be in attendance. Who knows you may just get to sit right next to this Super Star. I was please and grateful to met such a warm and kind man. He has been a positive role model for our community and for that I personally would like to Thank You for raising your voice and actions towards making our rights heard. Sam enjoy your stay and have fun doing your play. Come back and eat with us again at Jimmy Carters Mexican Cafe. (just remember it's somewhere over the rainbow)

Tags: [Balbo Park](#), [First Wives Club](#), [JimmyCarters Mexican Cafe](#), [Sam Harris](#)

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# Sheryl Lee Ralph to Replace Adriane Lenox in Old Globe's *The First Wives Club*

By: **Brian Scott Lipton** • Jun 16, 2009 • San Diego

Sheryl Lee Ralph will replace the previously announced Adriane Lenox as Elyse in the world premiere of the musical *The First Wives Club*, based on the 1996 film of the same name, to play a pre-Broadway engagement at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre, July 15-August 23.

The production, which will open officially on July 31, will be directed by Francesca Zambello, with choreography by Lisa Stevens. It will feature a book by Tony Award winner Rupert Holmes (based on the novel by Olivia Goldsmith and the film script by Robert Harting), and will have an original score by the legendary Motown team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland.

As previously announced, the cast will also feature Karen Ziemba as Annie, Barbara Walsh as Brenda, John Dossett as Aaron, Kevyn Morrow as Bill, Brad Oscar as Morty, Sara Chase as the Trophy Wife, and Sam Harris as Duane. The cast will also include Ari Lerner, Austyn Myers, Michelle Aravena, Mark Campbell, Thursday Farrar, Jenifer Foote, Bob Gaynor, Matthew LaBanca, Victoria Matlock, Hayley Podschun, Martin Samuel, and Richard Waits.

The design team includes Peter J. Davison (sets), Paul Tazewell (costumes), Mark McCullough (lighting), Jon Weston (sound), Ron Melrose (music supervision), and Harold Wheeler (orchestrations).



Sheryl Lee Ralph  
(© Joseph Marzullo/Retna)

For tickets and other information, call 619-23-GLOBE or visit [www.theoldglobe.org](http://www.theoldglobe.org).

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# Sheryl Lee Ralph tops 'Wives' Club'

**Musical plays at the Old Globe July 17-Aug. 23.**

By GORDON COX

[Sheryl Lee Ralph](#) has stepped into a lead role in the Broadway-aimed tuner adaptation of “The First Wives’ Club,” which recently began rehearsals for its out-of-town tryout at San Diego’s Old Globe Theater.

Ralph (“Dreamgirls,” “Thoroughly Modern Millie”) replaces [Adriane Lenox](#), who bowed out due to health concerns, according to the Old Globe.

Actress joins [Barbara Walsh](#) and [Karen Ziemba](#) as a trio of women who are all dumped by their husbands for younger women.

Francesca Zambello (“The Little Mermaid”) directs the musical, with score by Motown songwriters [Brian Holland](#), [Lamont Dozier](#) and [Eddie Holland](#) and book by [Rupert Holmes](#) (“Curtains”).

“First Wives” plays at the Old Globe July 17-Aug. 23. Specifics for the Broadway run, produced by [Paul Lambert](#) and [Jonas Neilson](#), remain to be confirmed.

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## Sheryl Lee Ralph replaces Tony winner in 'First Wives Club'

7:39 PM, June 16, 2009

There's been a major cast change for the upcoming production of "[The First Wives Club -- A New Musical](#)." Adriane Lenox, who won a Tony Award in 2005 for her role as a morally compromised mother in "Doubt," has withdrawn from the show, which is set to open in July at the [Old Globe](#) in San Diego. She will be replaced by actress Sheryl Lee Ralph (pictured at right).

The Old Globe said that Lenox had left the production before rehearsals began. The company cited health concerns as the reason for her exit. The actress had been set to play the role of Elyse, the character played by Goldie Hawn in the 1996 movie version.

Ralph, who has already begun rehearsals, [joins a cast that includes Karen Ziemba and Barbara Walsh](#). The actresses play middle-age divorcees who plot revenge against their ex-husbands. The show is based on the original novel by Olivia Goldsmith and the feature film adaptation. Directed by Francesca Zambello, the musical is said to be Broadway-bound, though no dates or theaters have been announced yet.

Ralph received a Tony nomination in 1982 for her role in the original Broadway production of "Dreamgirls," in which she played the role of Deena Jones. Her other Broadway credits include the 2002 revival of "Thoroughly Modern Millie."

"First Wives Club" will feature songs by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland. The book is by Rupert Holmes.





June 17, 2009

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## Tell Us, Miss Jones: Sheryl Lee Ralph Will Be Part of *First Wives Club*

By *Kenneth Jones*

16 Jun 2009

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Sheryl Lee Ralph

Broadway and television star Sheryl Lee Ralph —

Deena Jones

in the original

*Dreamgirls* —

has joined the

cast of the

Broadway-

bound musical

*The First*

*Wives Club* in the role of Elyse, replacing

Tony Award winner Adriane Lenox.

*Doubt* and *Kiss Me, Kate* star Lenox left the production before the start of the rehearsal process due to health concerns, the Old Globe announced June 16.

Ralph received a Tony Award nomination for Best Actress in a Musical for the original Broadway production of *Dreamgirls*. She also originated the role of Muzzy Van Hossmere in the Tony Award-winning musical, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Ralph was also a series regular on television's "Moesha" and "Designing Women." Her performance with Danny Glover in the film "To Sleep with Anger" won her the Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Actress.

*The First Wives Club* — A New Musical, will be performed at the Old Globe





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Theatre in San Diego, CA, July 17–Aug. 23 as part of the Globe's 2009 Summer Season. Based on the best-selling novel and Hollywood blockbuster of the same name, the musical features a book by Tony winner Rupert Holmes (*Curtains!*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Say Goodnight Gracie*) and a score by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, the threesome who created hits for Martha and The Vandellas, The Miracles, Marvin Gaye, The Four Tops and The Supremes.

The production will be directed by award winning opera and theatrical director Francesca Zambello (*The Little Mermaid* for Disney on Broadway, *Little House on the Prairie* for the Guthrie Theatre).

According to the Old Globe, "*The First Wives Club* is a funny, moving and empowering new musical based on the smash-hit movie comedy and Olivia Goldsmith's bestselling novel. Former college friends reunite at middle-age and soon discover they share the same unhappy story — their ungrateful husbands careened into midlife by dumping them for younger women. Inspired by their renewed friendship, the three women band together and take back their lives in style!"

Ralph joins the previously announced Barbara Walsh (*Company*, *Big, Fish*) as Brenda, Tony winner Karen Ziemba (*Contact*, *Curtains*) as Annie, Tony nominee John Dossett (*Gypsy*) as Aaron, Kevyn Morrow (*Dreamgirls*) as Bill, Tony nominee Brad Oscar (*The Producers*) as Morty, Sara Chase as Trophy Wife, and Tony nominee Sam Harris (*The Life*) as Duane, and Ari Lerner and Austyn Myers alternating as Jason. The cast includes Michelle Aravena, Mark Campbell, Thursday Farrar, Jenifer Foote, Bob Gaynor, Matthew LaBanca, Victoria Matlock, Kat Palardy, Martin Samuel and Richard Waits.

Tickets to *First Wives Club — The Musical* are currently available by contacting the Globe Box Office at (619) 23-GLOBE or online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org).



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## STAGE TUBE: 'THE FIRST WIVES CLUB' - Behind The Scenes With Sam Harris

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Monday, July 27, 2009; Posted: 12:07 AM - by [BroadwayWorld TV](#)
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**BWV TV presents - StageTube! Presenting the best in viral, viewer-created videos right here on BroadwayWorld.com.**

First Wives Club The Musical is here! [Sam Harris](#) brings you to an exclusive behind the scenes look at the production process of a new Broadway bound musical. For more video fun visit, [www.samtube.com](http://www.samtube.com)

Sam's recent role on the CBS comedy, The Class, is the latest incarnation of a career than has spanned more than two decades and run the gamut from singer/songwriter to stage, film, television actor to writer, producer, director. Born in Ukiah, CA, Sam performed in his first play when he was five and left home at 15 to pursue his career, learning the ropes through regional and repertory theatre. He finished high school through correspondence courses and attended UCLA.

[Sam Harris](#) played "every dump and dive in LA" and created his first solo stint, Out of Control, which caught the attention of talent scouts from a television talent show. Sam then became a household name on Star Search in its premiere season. Twenty five million viewers tuned in week after week to see his pop, gospel and theatre brand of emotionally charged performances, finally winning the grand prize and the hearts of America. His phenomenal "overnight" rise catapulted him into the recording industry, where he sold over a million copies of his first CDs. Concert tours, including a performance at [Carnegie Hall](#), followed, and soon he was in every magazine and talk show.

Broadway called and Sam received a Drama Desk nomination for his role in [Tommy Tune](#)'s Grease. He then toured in the Broadway National tour of [Andrew Lloyd Webber](#)'s Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. Sam next starred in [Cy Coleman](#)'s The Life, for which he received the Drama-League Award as well as Tony, Outer Critic's Circle and Drama Desk nominations. He was also seen to much acclaim in the Broadway mega hit, The Producers. He has also written sit-coms, musicals and television specials and recently released his 8th CD and is performing in the CBS show, Rules of Engagement.

Previews for the world premiere of The First Wives Club - A New Musical are now set to begin July 17, 2009. The schedule was changed to accommodate a revised rehearsal/technical schedule.

Based on the best-selling novel and film of the same name, this Broadway-bound musical features a book by Tony Award-winner [Rupert Holmes](#) (Curtains!, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Say Goodnight Gracie) and a score by Motown hit-makers and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees [Brian Holland](#), [Lamont Dozier](#) and [Eddie Holland](#), the threesome who created hits for Martha and The Vandellas, [The Miracles](#), [Marvin Gaye](#), [The Four Tops](#) and [The Supremes](#). The production will be directed by award-winning opera and theatre director [Francesca Zambello](#) ([The Little Mermaid](#), Little House on the Prairie - The Musical, Rebecca, Porgy and Bess and the Wagner Ring Cycle at the San Francisco Opera where she is the Artistic Advisor). The production will run in the [Old Globe Theatre](#) July 17 - August 23, 2009, with a press opening on Friday, July 31 at 8:00pm. Following its run at [The Old Globe](#), The First Wives Club will be produced on Broadway by [Paul Lambert](#) and Jonas Neilson, with a theatre and dates to be announced.

Tickets are available immediately through subscription purchase. Individual tickets for The First Wives Club - A New Musical go on sale Sunday, June 7 at 10am and are available by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, on the Globe website at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org), or by visiting The Globe box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. Ticket prices range from \$55 to \$92.


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**TM** Feature

## First Lady

**Director Francesca Zambello discusses preparing *The First Wives Club* and *Little House on the Prairie***

By: [Thom Vegh](#) · Jul 22, 2009 · Touring Productions

While she first made her name in the world of opera, Francesca Zambello is now just as home with Wagner as she is with Broadway musicals. She directed Disney's [The Little Mermaid](#), which remains on Broadway at the [Lunt-Fontanne Theatre](#) until August 30, and is now behind the wheel for both [The First Wives Club](#), which is having its pre-Broadway tryout at San Diego's [Old Globe Theatre](#) with a cast headed by Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba, and Sheryl Lee Ralph, and [The Little House on the Prairie](#), which begins a nearly year-long tour at New Jersey's [Paper Mill Playhouse](#) in September starring Melissa Gilbert. TheaterMania recently spoke with this internationally renowned stage director about her work.



Francesca Zambello  
(© Joseph Marzullo/WENN)

**THEATERMANIA:** When did you know you wanted to direct?

**FRANCESCA ZAMBELLO:** From a pretty early age. I was the kind of kid who got together the local neighborhood kids and I wrote, costumed and directed whatever story we invented. Clearly, I did not even know I was actually directing, but it was that sense of storytelling and drawing people together was in my DNA. By high school, I was directing plays, and in college I started an alternative theater group to be able to direct things the university theater did not want to present.

**TM:** After you initially read the book for *The First Wives Club* and listened to the songs what was your emotional response? And how did you proceed after you took on the project?  
**FZ:** When I came onboard, there were only a few songs written in response to the idea of a musical. They were powerful, captivating, and generated a real visceral response. They spoke to the emotions of the heart and had the Motown groove, which make characters want to physicalize their stories. Then Rupert Holmes joined the project to write the book and we worked with the composers, Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland, to shape the piece. It became clear to us that we needed to use the film and novel as inspiration, but also we had to make the story speak, not as a period

piece, but as a contemporary story. We did not want to parrot the film. For example, setting the story for today made us revamp the performer character, Elyse Elliot, so she became a woman of color who was a big R&B star. Once we knew the characters and had settled on the structure, I evolved a fluid physical landscape to set our story that would evoke the architecture of New York City without being slavishly naturalistic.



Barbara Walsh, Karen Ziemba, and Sheryl Lee Ralph in *The First Wives Club*  
(© Craig Schwartz)

TM: You manipulate a number of disciplines when creating a musical. How do you begin to share your vision with your co-creators?

**FZ: Communication. It is important to start to draw in your collaborators as the script and score evolve. The more input at that point will help shape the work. Once you have a structure in place, you can incorporate everyone's contribution to storytelling. Sometimes a set informs a new scene, or you see you do not actually need a scene because a dance would tell that part of the story. Just as you want your acting company to be an ensemble, it is the same thing in working with your designers, music team and your choreographer.**

TM: Working on a world premiere musical takes Olympian efforts. During the final stretch, such as after the final dress rehearsal and before the first preview, what do you reflect upon?

**FZ: There is no time for reflection as there is a constant list on a yellow pad to be done. This time is pure anxiety.**

TM: What was the process like transferring the story of *Little House on the Prairie* from a book and a wildly popular television program to musical theater?

**FZ: Like developing all musicals, it was long, arduous, hard, challenging, frustrating, and joyous.**

TM What opera projects await you?

**FZ: I am completing the *Ring Cycle* at the Kennedy Center and the San Francisco Opera over the next two years, and this fall, I am directing a charming unknown opera and ballet by Tchaikovsky called *The Tsarina's Slippers* at the Royal Opera House.**

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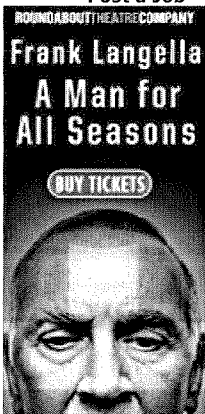
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## First Wives Club Musical Will Premiere in San Diego in 2009; Zambello Directs

By Kenneth Jones  
05 Sep 2008

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Francesca Zambello

*The First Wives Club* – A New Musical will premiere at The Old Globe in San Diego in summer 2009, prior to Broadway.

Based on the 1996 movie of the same name, the show about bitter ex-wives has a score by Motown writers Lamont Dozier, Brian Holland and Eddie Holland.

Songs by Holland-Lamont-Holland have been recorded by Rod Stewart, Michael Jackson, James Taylor, Marvin Gaye, The Dixie Chicks, The Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas, The Four Tops, The Isley Brothers, Freda Payne, The Carpenters, Barbara Streisand, Reba McEntire, The Temptations, Dionne Warwick, The Jackson Five and The Beatles to name just a few.

Their song hits include "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved by You)," "Baby I Need Your Loving," "Stop! In the Name of Love," "You Can't Hurry Love" and "I Can't Help Myself."

The librettist is Tony Award winner Rupert Holmes (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*).

Francesca Zambello (Broadway's *The Little Mermaid* and the Guthrie's *Little House on the Prairie*) will direct. The staging is reportedly scheduled to play the Globe July 15-Aug. 23, 2009, prior to Broadway. No casting has been announced.

The popular 1996 Paramount film "The First Wives Club" — about three divorced women who seek revenge on their former husbands — was based on Olivia Goldsmith's novel and featured a screenplay by Robert Harling. The motion picture grossed over \$130 million and starred Bette Midler, Goldie Hawn and Diane Keaton.

"The Old Globe has sent over 20 productions on to Broadway and this new musical is one of the most exciting projects that we have ever had the

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privilege to produce," stated Old Globe executive producer Lou Spisto. "Countless millions of people grew up singing along to the hits of Holland-Dozier-Holland and their songs continue to have an enormous impact on each new generation. To have them composing original music for this world premiere at The Old Globe is beyond exciting. With the multi-talented Tony Award-winner Rupert Holmes writing the book and one of the most sought after directors in both the world of Opera and the theatre, Francesca Zambello, at the helm, this universally beloved story is sure to bring a thrilling new theatrical experience to San Diego audiences."

The musical will be produced on Broadway by Paul Lambert and Jonas Neilson, with a theatre and dates to be announced.

Tickets to *First Wives Club — The Musical* are currently available by subscription by contacting the Globe Box Office at (619) 23-GLOBE or online at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org).

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## Flaming Lips headline racetrack series

Some big names make up the lineup for the Del Mar racetrack's Summer Concert Series (formerly known as the 4 O'Clock Fridays series).

The seven-week series features free concerts after the final horse race of the day on various evenings (six Fridays, two Saturdays, one Sunday and one Wednesday) from July 24 through Sept. 9.

Most concerts take place at the Del Mar Fairgrounds' Plaza de Mexico, with a few larger bands playing in the track infield and the season-closing concert in the fairgrounds' Paddock. Concert admission is free with paid racetrack admission.

The series is G. Love & Special Sauce, July 24; The Wailers, July 31; the Airborne Toxic Event, Aug. 7; Common Sense, Aug. 14; the Flaming Lips, Aug. 15; Pinback, Aug. 21; Steel Pulse, Aug. 22; Super Diamond, Aug. 28; Reggae Festival, Sept. 6; and a closing-day party on Sept. 9.

Call 858-755-1141 or visit [delmarscene.com](http://delmarscene.com).

■■■

San Diego County Fair is a great place to see a showcase of award-winning work by local artists, but on Thursday, fairgoers can see artists in action. From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., the fair will host the 2009 Plein Air Contest. More than 200 artists will set up their easels around the fairgrounds to capture fair scenes in oil, acrylic, watermedia, drawing, pastels and other media. Judges will announce the winners at 5 p.m. Visit [sdfair.com](http://sdfair.com).

■■■

Meanwhile, if you visit the fair on Thursday, there's much more to see.

Five North County singers and bands made it through the preliminary round of the San Diego County Fair's Musicpalooza contest last weekend. Eight bands and eight singers will compete Thursday in the semifinal rounds.

Bands hit the Grandstand stage at 11 a.m., and singers compete at 7 p.m. on the Showcase stage. The field will be narrowed to five semifinalists in each category for a final showdown July 3.

North County bands still in the running are Talk Like June of Escondido, the New Archaic of Encinitas and Endoxi of Carlsbad; and the North County singers who remain are Danielle Tucker of Ramona and Kate Fuller of Del Mar.

■■■

A free concert by the Marshall Tucker Band, scheduled for next Tuesday on the Paddock stage at the San Diego County Fair, has been canceled. Fair officials said the wife of the band's lead singer, Doug Gray, recently passed away and the band has canceled all engagements through July 1.

The Southern rock band the Outlaws will perform in its place.

■■■

Sheryl Lee Ralph has replaced

### BACKSTAGE



### PAM KRAGEN

Adriane Lenox in the Old Globe's pre-Broadway tryout of the musical "The First Wives Club," which will open in previews next month.

Lenox (who won the Tony Award for her performance in "Doubt") left the production during the rehearsal process because of health concerns, according to a statement by the Old Globe.

Ralph earned a Tony Award for originating the role of Deena in "Dreamgirls" and originated the role of Muzzy in the La Jolla Playhouse's original production of "Thoroughly Modern Millie." She was also a series regular on the television shows "Moesha" and "Designing Women."

"The First Wives Club" will run July 17 through Aug. 23.

■■■

Fans of North County-raised singing sensation Adam Lambert won't have to wait very long for the first album from the "American Idol" runner-up.

Before he went on the Fox television show this year, Lambert recorded more than two albums' worth of material with an L.A. record label, which is now planning to put 11 of the best tracks together for an album it will release this summer called "On With the Show."

In a published statement this week, Lambert acknowledged that he did record some songs in 2005 when he was a struggling artist, but that these songs do not reflect the style and sound of the music he is creating today.

Nonetheless, Hi Fi and Wilshire Records will go ahead with the release and fans can listen to the album's debut single, "Want," at [www.hifirecordings.com](http://www.hifirecordings.com).

Meanwhile, Lambert is in the midst of recording a new CD with 19 Recordings/RCA, the label associated with "American Idol," and that CD should be out in November. He will visit his hometown of San Diego with the "American Idols" Live! tour on July 18 at the San Diego Sports Arena.

■■■

To promote its musical "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," Cygnet Theatre in San Diego will offer half-price admission to all ticket-buyers who show up dressed in drag for a late-night performance on Saturday.

"Hedwig" is a rock musical about

a frustrated rock singer struggling to overcome the emotional and physical distress of a botched sex-change operation.

Customers are encouraged to dress as Hedwig or as Hedwig's bandmate Yitzhak for the performance at 10 p.m. at 6663 El Cajon Blvd., Suite N, in San Diego. They'll get half-off the regular ticket prices of \$32 to \$36. Call 619-337-1525.

■■■

Five years after it was born at La Jolla Playhouse and settled into a Tony-winning run on Broadway, the musical "Jersey Boys" is still one of the hardest-to-get tickets in town. Tickets for the Broadway show are sold out several months in advance, so buyers have to either plan way ahead or buy tickets at a steep premium through ticket agencies.

Now, StubHub is launching an online marketplace where "Jersey Boys" fans can buy and sell tickets between each other or buy tickets that aren't available at the box office.

It's the first such marketing technique for a Broadway show, and the StubHub site will offer tickets not only to the Broadway production of "Jersey Boys" but also the resident productions now playing in New York, Chicago and Las Vegas.

"Jersey Boys" tell the rags-to-riches musical story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.

Pam Kragen is the arts editor of the North County Times.

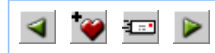
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right when it was starting to feel real... ( [riot\\_cabaret](#) ) wrote in [bwaydaily](#),  
 @ [2009-07-29](#) 14:26:00



**Entry tags:** [\\*the first wives club](#), [extensions/transfers](#), [page to stage](#), [screen to stage](#), [west coast](#)

### ***Yay, I suppose.***

Broadway-Aimed *First Wives Club* Gets Extra Week in San Diego



The world premiere run of *The First Wives Club – A New Musical* at The Old Globe in San Diego has been extended by one week to Aug. 30. The musical based on the film and novel of the same name officially opens July 31.

No Broadway dates have yet been announced for the show.

[Source](#)



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HAS ANYONE SEEN THIS YET?!

I'm dying to hear how it is.

I'm already pissed as hell, though, that they're not including "You Don't Own Me".



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### Acting Out

Damien Jaques, the Journal Sentinel's theater critic, offers theater news and commentary.

## "First Wives Club," with a Motown twist, hopes for Broadway

By Damien Jaques of the Journal Sentinel

July 26, 2009

Remember the 1996 hit movie "First Wives Club"? A new stage musical based on the film is currently in rehearsals in San Diego with Broadway its goal. The old Motown song writing team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and Eddie Holland is composing the score.

[Here](#) is an interesting story about the venture from the Los Angeles Times. By the way, the musical's director, Francesca Zambello, was once the co-artistic director of the now troubled Skylight Opera Theatre.

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# SAN DIEGO JEWISH JOURNAL

July 2009

**SDJJ** | what's goin' on

by eileen sondak

## the stage heats up for the summer season

The weather is hot, hot, hot, and so is the entertainment scene. Theatergoers can opt for a grab bag of alfresco productions or a rich assortment of indoor offerings available around the county. Among the highlights in the July mix are touring productions of "Fiddler on the Roof" and the megahit "Wicked," not to mention the world premiere of the Broadway-bound musical, "The First Wives Club." San Diego Pops has turned up the heat in Embarcadero Marina Park South with its busy slate, and there is plenty of other entertainment to entice you this month.

Broadway-San Diego has two can't-miss shows onboard this month. July 14-19, Chaim Topol (star of the original film "Fiddler on the Roof") heads a strong cast in the farewell tour of the live stage production. The musical masterpiece (featuring Jerome Robbins' choreography) will delight audiences at the Civic Theatre with its unforgettable songs, story and dance numbers.

Also on tap from Broadway-San Diego is the welcome return of "Wicked," which was a smash hit in San Diego in 2006. "Wicked" arrives at the Civic July 29 for an extended run through Aug. 30. Tickets may still sell out early, so don't wait too long to snare a seat. The touring production has been a box office bonanza everywhere in the country.

The Old Globe's new musical "The First Wives Club" bows in for its world premiere July 17, and it will be happily ensconced in Balboa Park through Aug. 23. The show (based on the hit film and Olivia Goldsmith's best-selling novel) is funny, moving and empowering. It tells the story of former college friends uniting for their middle-age

reunion. Francesca Zambello directs this show with two Tony Award winners (Adriane Lenox and Karen Ziemba) in the Broadway-bound cast.

The Globe's Festival Stage continues its three-play repertory. Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" (one of the Bard's most beloved comedies) and "Coriolanus" (one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies) will rotate with a non-Shakespeare classic, Edmond Rostand's romantic tragedy "Cyrano de Bergerac" throughout the summer. The Globe's resident artistic director Darko Tresnjak staged both "Coriolanus" and "Cyrano de Bergerac" while local favorite Paul Mullins directed "Twelfth Night." Broadway veteran Patrick Page plays Cyrano. Also among this talented repertory company are Charles Janasz, Celeste Ciulla, Grant Goodman and Eric Hoffman.

■ Among the highlights in the July mix are touring productions of "Fiddler on the Roof" and the megahit "Wicked," not to mention the world premiere of the Broadway-bound musical, "The First Wives Club."

Broadway-San Diego brings back an audience favorite with "Wicked" July 29. This tale about Oz's three witches will remain until Aug. 30.



PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS

# SAN DIEGO News Network

May 20, 2009

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## NEWS AND VIEWS

... Meanwhile, back at the **Globe**, the cast for the world premiere of the movie-based, Broadway-bound world premiere musical, "**The First Wives Club**," has fueled anticipation. Adriane Lenox, who won a Tony in 2005 for her brief but memorable performance in the drama, "Doubt," will play Elyse, and Karen Ziemba, a 2000 Tony-winner for "Contact," will play Annie. Ziemba made a splash at the Globe this season, in "Six Degrees of Separation." The score for the new musical is a reunion collaboration of long-time hit-makers Lamont Dozer, Brian Holland and Eddie Holland, the killer songwriting team behind tunes such as "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved by You)," "Baby I Need Your Loving," "Stop! In the Name of Love" and "You Can't Hurry Love." Tickets go on sale June 7; the show runs July 15-August 23.

# SAN DIEGO News Network

July 16, 2009

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## Weekend eight greats: Gay pride, Adam Lambert, Harry Potter

**Get out of the house and get out on the town**

By Joseph Peña, [SDNN](#)

**“The First Wives Club”**: The Old Globe will host the world premiere, Broadway-bound musical “The First Wives Club,” beginning Friday, July 17. Based on the wildly popular film starring Diane Keaton, Bette Midler and Goldie Hawn, the stage production follows the same formula: three friends reunite to mourn the death of another, and, upon reconnecting, discover they share a sad story - they’ve all been dumped by their husbands for younger women. The trio plots to reclaim their lives, and, in the meantime, make a difference. The show is sure to be fun and funny, and a delight for all. For ticket information, call 619-234-5623.





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## IT'S ON AGAIN FOR 2009: Sheryl Lee Ralph's 19th annual Divas Simply Singing!

Grammy Winners Yolanda Adams, Brenda Russell and Tony Award Nominee Sam Harris Bring Star Power to AIDS Benefit!

(August 25, 2009)

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Buzz up!

\*LOS ANGELES -- One diva. One song. One night to touch a million lives. And certainly, two multiple Grammy award-winning divas, singing on behalf of HIV/AIDS awareness is better than one! Actress/activist Sheryl Lee Ralph is happy to announce the all-star, mega-watt line up for the 19th annual Divas Simply Singing! AIDS benefit concert.

Yolanda Adams, Brenda Russell, Jenifer Lewis, Yo Yo, Barbara Morrison, Frenchie Davis, and Neo Soul Artist N'dambi along with original Dreamgirls Loretta Devine and Ralph herself will light up the stage! Sam Harris will be the resident divo, paying tribute to the ladies.

The pre-show will be hosted by Emmy-nominated comedienne/actress Niecy Nash.

Created and produced by Ralph, Divas Simply Singing! is an annual benefit concert, produced in conjunction with The Diva( Divinely Inspired Victoriously Anointed) Foundation to help to raise money and awareness about HIV/AIDS. Divas Simply Singing! is the longest consecutive running AIDS benefit concert in Los Angeles and has raised millions of dollars to help and assist AIDS organizations in Los Angeles and around the world. This amazing evening of song and entertainment spotlights the talents of divas from all walks of show business.

Divas Simply Singing! will be held on Saturday, October 10, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. at the Saban Theatre (formerly Wilshire Theatre), located at 8440 Wilshire Blvd. in Beverly Hills. Tickets prices range from \$25 to \$250. For ticket information, contact the box office of the Saban Theatre Beverly Hills at 323.655.0111.

The event is sponsored by fashion designer Tadashi Shoji; Aetna; Bristol-Myers Squibb; Diageo and American Hi-Definition, ATK, Sweetwater Productions. American Airlines; Damone Roberts "the Eyebrow King" and "Glam God" to the divas. The afterparty sponsored by KCAA radio personality Wendell James of "Talking With Wendell." And Media sponsor KJLH-FM.

*About Divas Simply Singing!*

"It's one of the best events in town, where music raises the roof, the applause pours out like love and the tears flow like redemption." - Daryl H. Miller, LA Times

With a unique blend of song, entertainment and empowerment, this oft-praised and highly-anticipated event continues to attract some of the most talented women in show business, uniting in song against HIV/AIDS. Talents such as Chaka Khan, Oleta Addams, Melissa Manchester, Dianne Reeves, Roberta Flack, Eartha Kitt, Stephanie Mills, Fergie, Loretta

### Education Update

#### Obama Asks Moms to Return to School Finish Your Degree - Government Grants and Scholarships are Available



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Devine, Jennifer Holiday, Miss Nancy Wilson and many others have raised their voices in song and support of Divas Simply Singing!

This year, Divas Simply Singing! is thrilled to benefit AIDS Healthcare Foundation and Women Alive Coalition. In the past, proceeds from the concert have benefited Project Angel Food, Caring for Babies With AIDS, Minority AIDS Project, the Safe Place for Pediatric AIDS, the National Minority Council, and the Black AIDS Institute.

#### *About the Diva Foundation*

The Diva Foundation is a national not-for-profit 501(3) charitable organization founded by Sheryl Lee Ralph in 1990 as a memorial to the many friends she lost to HIV/AIDS while in the original Broadway company of DreamGirls.. The organization focuses on generating resources and coordinating activities to create awareness of and combat against HIV/AIDS. The Diva Foundation utilizes music and entertainment as a vehicle to inform, educate and erase the stigma still attached to this disease. In 2005, Sheryl Lee Ralph and the DIVA Foundation received the first Red Ribbon Leadership Award at the United Nations on World AIDS Day for the unique use of the arts in fighting HIV/AIDS.

#### *About Sheryl Lee Ralph*

It's difficult to remember a time when people died in numbers too great to imagine and families turned their backs on loved ones dying in silence, stigma and shame. It's hard to remember that people didn't talk about AIDS in America but Sheryl Lee Ralph has never forgotten. That is why she created the DIVA (Divinely Inspired Victoriously Anointed) Foundation. Her dedicated commitment has led to the 19th Annual Divas Simply Singing! And her critically acclaimed one-woman show, "Sometimes I Cry," a production written and performed by Ralph, which explores the lives of women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and continues to tour the world.

"If I was fortunate for the country - and world - that two years ago Ralph became sufficiently outraged over the silence about HIV/AIDS and how it kills too many people, too many women, to many black Americans. Not only did she find her voice when writing Sometimes I Cry. She found her calling." - Mary Martin Niepold, Winston-Salem Journal

With continued success on stage, screen, television and music along with her philanthropic endeavors, Sheryl Lee Ralph has never been one to rest on her laurels. A triple threat dreamgirl, Ralph is an acclaimed veteran of film, television and the Broadway stage. Her award-winning work includes creating the role of Deena Jones in the legendary Broadway musical, "Dreamgirls," which earned her Best Actress nods for Tony and Drama Desk Awards. She returned to Broadway for a 12-month stint in the Tony-award winning musical, "Thoroughly Modern Millie," creating the role of sassy chanteuse Muzzy Van Hossmere to rave reviews. Ralph has just wrapped the Broadway bound production of The First Wives Club musical at The Old Globe in San Diego, where she brought new life to the role of Elyse Elliot, originally played by Goldie Hawn in the movie.

No stranger to television, Ralph's credits include "It's a Living," "Designing Women," "The District," and most notably, "Moesha" for which TV Guide named her one of TV's best Mom's and was nominated for seven Image Awards. Sheryl has shared the big screen with some of Hollywood's award-winning leading men with film credits that include "The Mighty Quinn" with Denzel Washington; "Mistress" with Robert de Niro; "The Distinguished Gentlemen" with Eddie Murphy and "To Sleep With Anger" with Danny Glover for which Ralph picked up a win for Best Supporting Actress at the Independent Spirit Awards for her critically acclaimed performance.

Finding success in writing and directing, Ralph's award-winning short film, "Secrets," co-starring award-winning actress Alfre Woodard and Robin Givens was a finalist in the HBO Film Short Competition, Showtime's Filmmaker Award Series, and the BET Filmmaker Award Competition. The film was also selected as the audience favorite at the Outfest Film Festival. "Secrets" was screened at the Toronto International Film Festival, as well as the Hollywood Film Festival, the Acapulco Film Festival and the Urban World Film Festival.

#### *Did you know?*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that about 250,000 of the 1.2 million people living with HIV don't know they are infected. Get tested! Visit [www.testtogether.org](http://www.testtogether.org) [www.divassimplysinging.org](http://www.divassimplysinging.org)

"Don't walk around with a time bomb in your vagina! Get tested!" -- Sheryl Lee Ralph, actress/activist

[www.testtogether.org](http://www.testtogether.org)  
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## Photo Flash: 'THE FIRST WIVES CLUB' At The Old Globe Theatre

[Back to the Article](#)

by BWW News Desk

A world premiere, Broadway-bound musical, *The First Wives Club*, is a funny, moving and empowering new musical based on the smash-hit movie comedy and [Olivia Goldsmith](#)'s bestselling novel. Former college friends reunite at middle-age and soon discover they share the same unhappy story - their ungrateful husbands careened into midlife by dumping them for younger women. Inspired by their renewed friendship, the three women band together and take back their lives in style! This captivating new musical is destined to be the theatrical event of 2009!

[The Old Globe](#)'s world premiere production stars [Barbara Walsh](#) as "Brenda," [Karen Ziemba](#) as "Annie" and [Sheryl Lee Ralph](#) as "Elyse." The *First Wives Club* is directed by [Francesca Zambello](#).



Based on the best-selling novel and film of the same name, this Broadway-bound musical features a book by Tony Award-winner [Rupert Holmes](#) (*Curtains!*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Say Goodnight Gracie*) and a score by Motown hit-makers and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees [Brian Holland](#), [Lamont Dozier](#) and [Eddie Holland](#), the threesome who created hits for Martha and The Vandellas, [The Miracles](#), [Marvin Gaye](#), [The Four Tops](#) and [The Supremes](#). The production is directed by award-winning opera and theatre director [Francesca Zambello](#) ([The Little Mermaid](#), *Little House on the Prairie - The Musical*, *Rebecca*, *Porgy and Bess* and the Wagner Ring Cycle at the San Francisco Opera where she is the Artistic Advisor). The production runs in the [Old Globe Theatre](#) July 17 - August 23, 2009, with a press opening on Friday, July 31 at 8:00pm.

Following its run at [The Old Globe](#), *The First Wives Club* will be produced on Broadway by [Paul Lambert](#) and Jonas Neilson, with a theatre and dates to be announced.

Tickets are available through subscription purchase. Individual tickets for *The First Wives Club - A New Musical* are available by calling (619) 23-GLOBE, on the Globe website at [www.TheOldGlobe.org](http://www.TheOldGlobe.org), or by visiting The Globe box office at 1363 Old Globe Way in Balboa Park. Ticket prices range from \$55 to \$92.

Photos by [Craig Schwartz](#)





[Barbara Walsh](#) as Brenda, [Sheryl Lee](#) Ralph as Elyse and [Karen Ziemba](#) as Annie in the world premiere of *The First Wives Club - A New Musical*



[Karen Ziemba](#), [Sheryl Lee](#) Ralph and [Barbara Walsh](#)





[Karen Ziemba](#), [Sheryl Lee Ralph](#) and [Barbara Walsh](#)



[Brad Oscar](#), [Kevyn Morrow](#) and [John Dossett](#)



[Sara Chase](#), [Sam Harris](#) and [Brad Oscar](#)



[The cast of](#) The First Wives Club - A New Musical



[Sheryl Lee Ralph](#), [Karen Ziemba](#) and [The cast of](#) The First Wives Club - A New Musical

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### 'First Wives Club' makes divorce trivial

Barbara Walsh (left) as Brenda, Sheryl Lee Ralph as Elyse and Karen Ziemba as Annie in the world premiere of "The First Wives Club – A New Musical, running through Aug. 23 at The Old Globe.

CRAIG SCHWARTZ

» [Read story](#)





### 'First Wives Club' makes divorce trivial

Karen Ziemba (left) as Annie, Sheryl Lee Ralph as Elyse and Barbara Walsh as Brenda in the world premiere of "The First Wives Club – A New Musical." The three plot to get revenge on their philandering exes.

CRAIG SCHWARTZ

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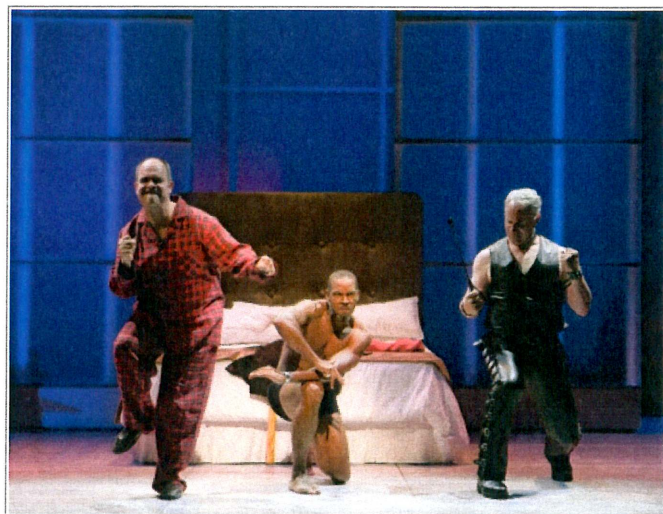


### 'First Wives Club' makes divorce trivial

Brad Oscar (left) as Morty, Kevyn Morrow as Bill and John Dossett as Aaron in the world premiere of "The First Wives Club – A New Musical."

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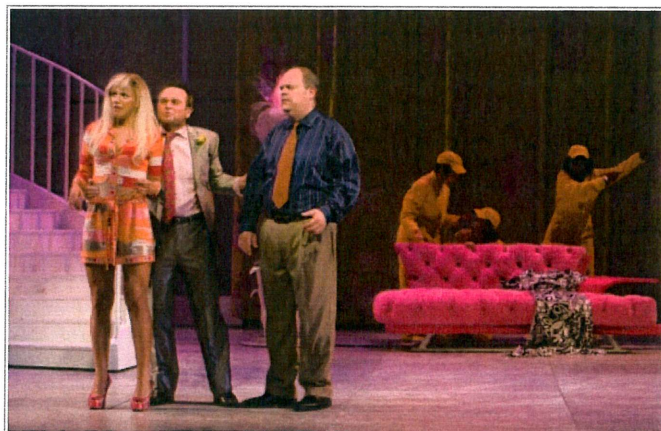


### 'First Wives Club' makes divorce trivial

Sara Chase (left) as Shelly, Sam Harris as Duane and Brad Oscar as Morty with Barbara Walsh as Brenda, Karen Ziemba as Annie and Sheryl Lee Ralph as Elyse (behind) in the world premiere of "The First Wives Club – A New Musical."

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### 'First Wives Club' makes divorce trivial

The cast of the world premiere of The First Wives Club – A New Musical, running through Aug. 23 at The Old Globe.

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### 'First Wives Club' makes divorce trivial

Sheryl Lee Ralph as Elyse and Karen Ziemba as Annie (on pedestal) with the cast of the world premiere of "The First Wives Club – A New Musical."

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