



THEATER LOOP

News from America's hottest theater city

By Chris Jones

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Recipe for 'Shout': Fun music, cocktails in the lobby



NEW YORK—"Let's face it," says Victoria Lang, the New York-based producer of the musical revue "Shout! The Mod Musical," "most buyers of theater tickets are women over 50 years old. But my husband likes this show too. There are a lot of pretty young girls in miniskirts."

There you have it. The great thing about commercial theater producers—and Lang is an especially down-to-earth and likable one—is that they are willing to cut to the chase.

"Shout," which opens Thursday at the Drury Lane Theatre at Water Tower Place in an open run, ain't "Macbeth" or even "Oklahoma." But it hits a lot of desirable demographic groups. Especially for a show setting up shop just a few steps from the well-traveled, retail-hugging sidewalks of Chicago's Magnificent Mile.

"Shout" is a revue composed of the soundtrack of the Swinging London of the 1960s.

Not all the stars of that era made the transition across the Atlantic—the likes of Lulu,

Petula Clark and Cilla Black remain much bigger celebrities in the U.K. than in the U.S. And Dusty Springfield, one of the best known stars of the Carnaby Street-era and the singer who made the most successful inroads Stateside, died in 1999 at the age of 60 of breast cancer.

But many of the catchy, bouncy hits of the time—"I Only Want to Be With You," "Downtown," "Those Were the Days"—have proved their longevity. Furthermore, the perennial popularity of James Bond movies ("Goldfinger," "Diamonds Are Forever" and so on) and the satirical ministrations of Austin Powers have given the catalog a further shot in the naked arm.

"Shout" has been knocking around the block for a while. It's played in Florida and in New York. And wherever it has stopped, it has unabashedly pitched itself as a party show—90 all-singing, all-dancing, all-nostalgic minutes, with martinis available in the lobby.

Clearly, business will be bigger on the weekends. So "Shout" is doing an unusual three-show Saturday—performances are at 2, 6 and 9 p.m.—followed by yet two more on Sunday. If this were an Equity show, it couldn't do that.

But right from the start, Lang has cast very young, non-Equity performers (although the show comes with big-name Broadway designers and will have the requisite union musicians in Chicago). "We saw 92 girls at the auditions," Lang says. "This cast is even better than the one we had in New York."

After the Chicago run—which, if sales go well, could last through Christmas—the Chicago production is being booked on a national tour. But for now, at least, Chicago will be the only place in America you can see "Shout."

"Altar Boyz," the last show at the Drury Lane, did not do as well financially as its producers hoped. But although I liked the Chicago production very much, that satirical show came with a tricky title for theatergoers to understand. Some people thought it was strictly for gay audiences; others thought it was only for churchgoers.

"Shout! The Mod Musical" doesn't need much explaining. Especially to the women who will be buying most of the tickets.

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