

Kravis to preview mod 1960s revue
'Shout! The Mod Musical', which opens Friday at Rinker Playhouse, takes a musical look at women's road to independence.

By [JAN SJOSTROM](#), Daily News Arts Editor

Thursday, June 08, 2006

There never would have been a *Shout! The Mod Musical* if Phillip George hadn't been directing a show in London on March 2, 1999, the day British singer-songwriter Dusty Springfield died. The following night, George visited a pub where Springfield's hits were being played.

"People in the bar sang along, every last one of them," he said. "People were crying. It was a big deal in Great Britain. They'd lost a cultural icon."

The patrons' exuberance spurred George to explore Springfield's music more deeply, which led him to other songstresses who dominated the charts in the early 1960s, when Britain's mini-skirted and mop-topped Mod culture engulfed the Western world.

"I didn't know a lot of people in London," George said. "I was a little blue, frankly. The music altered my mood. It's hard to be depressed when you're listening to *Don't Sleep on the Subway*."

A veteran of multiple *Forbidden Broadways* and so many other revues that he calls himself "the king of the off-Broadway revue," George spotted the theatrical potential in the upbeat music.

He knew a lot of out-of-work actresses. Why couldn't he and his pal, choreographer David Lowenstein, cook up an all-girl revue featuring tunes by singers such as Springfield, Petula Clark, LuLu and Shirley Bassey?

Fast-forward six years to the Kravis Center, where the show begins with a preview Friday at the Rinker Playhouse and a three-week pre-New York run that may presage the emergence of the Kravis as a tryout venue for New York-bound shows.

Shout is performed by five female characters identified only by color. George lifted that idea from 1960s women's magazines, which had a penchant for divining their readers' personalities by the color of the clothing they preferred.

Magazines also inspired the show's collage-like structure, in which hits such as *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*, *Downtown* and *To Sir with Love* are presented as though the cast and audience were leafing through a magazine together.

The connecting thread is women's growing independence.



[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

Julie Dingman Evans, Erica Schroeder, Erin Crosby, Marie-France Arcilla and Denise Summerford star as Mod women in the musical 'Shout!' making its debut at the Kravis Center.

"These women were all singing their guts out and speaking for themselves," George said. "This was after birth control pills became widespread. Women were getting jobs. But they hadn't burned their bras yet. It's a window in between, when women were finding out where they belonged."

Like many shows, *Shout* had a long gestation. It began with a workshop in 2000 in New York. The following year, the revue transferred to a small London theater.

The present incarnation picked up speed a couple of years ago when lead producer Victoria Lang took an interest in it.

"I loved the music and the fashions," said the 51-year-old New Yorker, who described *Shout's* sensibility as "*Austin Powers* meets *Laugh-In*."

Lang insisted on changes that deepened the characters George said.

"She felt strongly that our audience was not jaded New Yorkers," he said. "Our audience was women in their late 40s and early 50s who had been through this period."

The Kravis came into the picture when the producers began looking for a venue where they could polish the one-act revue away from the gaze of New York critics before its July 11 opening at the Julia Miles Theatre off-Broadway.

The Kravis' access to a sophisticated theater audience and its state-of-the-art facilities make it an ideal tryout venue, Lang said.

"That's an idea we'd like to pursue," as a way of prolonging the season, said Lee Bell, the Kravis' senior programming director.

Bell was convinced that *Shout* would appeal to the same demographic that flocked to see *Menopause, The Musical* and *Respect: A Musical Journey of Women* during their multi-month runs at the Cuillo Centre for the Arts in West Palm Beach. So was Lang, who was South Florida theater mogul Zev Bufman's assistant in the early 1980s and whose partners include two producers from *Menopause's* long-running off-Broadway production.

The numbers bear out their faith. Two weeks before the show's opening at the Kravis, the center reported that 86 percent of the seats have been sold.

The show runs through July 2 at the Rinker Playhouse.

For tickets, call 832-7469.

<http://www.palmbeachdailynews.com/search/content/arts/shout0608.html>