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Show gets audience into the swing of things

—'Golf: The Musical' makes its South Florida debut at Maltz Jupiter Theatre. —

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Although New York producer Eric Krebs concedes that many people have shaken their heads over the idea of a show called *Golf: The Musical*, he thinks it is the most logical thing in the world.

"In an odd sort of way, golf and theater are a natural," he says. "I have always been obsessed by theater, as many are with golf. You just get into it, and you want to know all about it, you want to beat it. And you can never perfect it, like golf. You can never explain it, never solve it, even though you think you can. The similarities are there."



[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

FORE! Christopher Sutton (left), Irene Adjan, Jack Lawson and Joel Blum in *Golf: The Musical*.

It was Krebs, who has been producing theater for nearly 40 years without ever having a breakout, commercial hit, who first had the idea for the show. Over time, he noticed that a couple of revues — *Forbidden Broadway* and *The Capitol Steps* — have remained popular and profitable, year after year. And he realized they had similar formulas.

"I thought to myself, 'Hmm, four people and a piano. Four. Foursome. *Golf!*' "

So he took the idea of *Golf: The Musical* — which opened Thursday at the Maltz Jupiter Theatre in its first production since becoming a surprise off-Broadway hit seven months ago — to composer-lyricist Michael Roberts, who was once accompanist for *The Capitol Steps*.

Golf was one of several musical ideas Krebs had floated to Roberts. "If Eric had macaroni and cheese for lunch, he's the kind of guy that will stop you in the stairwell and say, 'Macaroni and cheese, do you think that will make a good musical? Would you want to write that?' " notes Roberts, perhaps exaggerating a little.

But Krebs kept whispering "golf" into Roberts' ear until the writer relented and got to work on the show. While they have since gotten the last laugh, Roberts understands that the show was initially met with much skepticism. In fact, that is



the premise of the opening number.

"As I was writing, we were talking about the perception of a show about golf," says Roberts. "Someone said, 'You know, people are going to think it's a terrible idea.' So we started joking around and decided that we should say that — no, sing that — right up front."

It turned out that kidding the mystique of golf, with all its foibles and fanaticism, was very popular with avid golfers, once you could convince them to leave the links long enough to attend a show.

"Some of what we've been dealing with is people who have golfers in their families," notes Krebs. "People who say, 'Uncle Lou would love that when he comes to New York,' or 'I got my husband to go to theater finally because it's golf.'"

But everyone connected with *Golf: The Musical* will tell you — as if it were a mantra — that you do not need to be a golfer to enjoy the show.

"I wanted something that husbands and wives could go to together," says Roberts. "Especially if the husbands play and the wives don't. The wives could enjoy the theater part of it, and there's a lot there that you have to know nothing at all about golf to enjoy. And there's enough in there that's specific to golf where you don't have to be an avid theater fan.

"And the meeting ground — who would have thunk it? — is golf musical theater."

Golfers and golf widows, take note: Here is a musical that could actually save you some money. "They're spending all this money on therapy trying to make their marriages work, when all they had to do is go to a golf musical," Roberts insists.

As the show was getting ready to open off-Broadway last November, Roberts steeled himself for the critics' reactions. "Yeah, I was resigned to them saying, no matter how clever it was, 'What a stupid idea,'" says Roberts. He consoled himself with the belief that this was an audience pleaser, and reviews were all but irrelevant. "We thought it was a good idea and knew the people would like it. The critics, you know — who knows?"

Roberts and Krebs were pleasantly surprised to get some favorable notices. "*The (New York) Times* loved it, they totally understood what we were doing," the author reports. Well, "loved it" might be a little excessive, but the influential paper did say that the revue's creators "turn mindlessness and predictability into art forms," a compliment of sorts.

"Oh, yeah," enthuses Roberts. "We made a silk purse out of a sow's ear. We're just a nice, simple, fun, funny show."

It's a show that Krebs now hopes to franchise around the country, as well as any international land where golf is played. To kick off *Golf: The Musical's* assault on the rest of the known world, he called up the Maltz Jupiter's executive producer, Todd Alan Price, and invited him to take a look at the New York production.

"I did, and I thought it was a really sweet show for us," Price reports. "I wouldn't have done it if I thought its appeal was really that narrow. Although golf is huge in Florida, I'm programming for the masses here."

One unusual aspect of the show is Roberts' intention to adapt the material to wherever the musical plays, and Price asked for and got two new songs for South Florida.

"There are just some obvious things about playing in Florida that are different than playing anywhere else in the country. One is playing the courses in the Florida heat in the summer," says Price, so Roberts obliged with a song about sweating. "And then you've got the perils of golf in Florida, which are the alligators, the snakes and the fire ants. I think people locally will be able to identify with that."

Those additions were relatively easy for Roberts, who has his work cut out for him when *Golf: The Musical* travels to Japan next year. "They're crazy about golf, but there's a great deal of politeness and manners in golf in Japan that we don't have," he says. "There's a lot of irreverence in *Golf: The Musical* that will have to be changed and toned down."

With St. Andrews, Scotland, next on the list of international sites for the show, and Australia and South Africa expressing interest, Roberts may be busy for a long time customizing rewrites. Still, he has already given thought to what is next for him. He doesn't want to become known as the guy who writes sports musicals, but lately he has been contemplating whether there is a show in tennis.

"I mean, I wasn't sure there was one in golf until I started writing it," Roberts says. "I know a lot of girls in short skirts and shorts would be really great. I'd want to be part of the costume team for that."

Golf: The Musical — Through Aug. 1 at Maltz Jupiter Theatre, 1001 E. Indiantown Road, Jupiter. Tickets: \$35-\$40. Phone: (561) 575-2223 or (800) 445-1666.

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