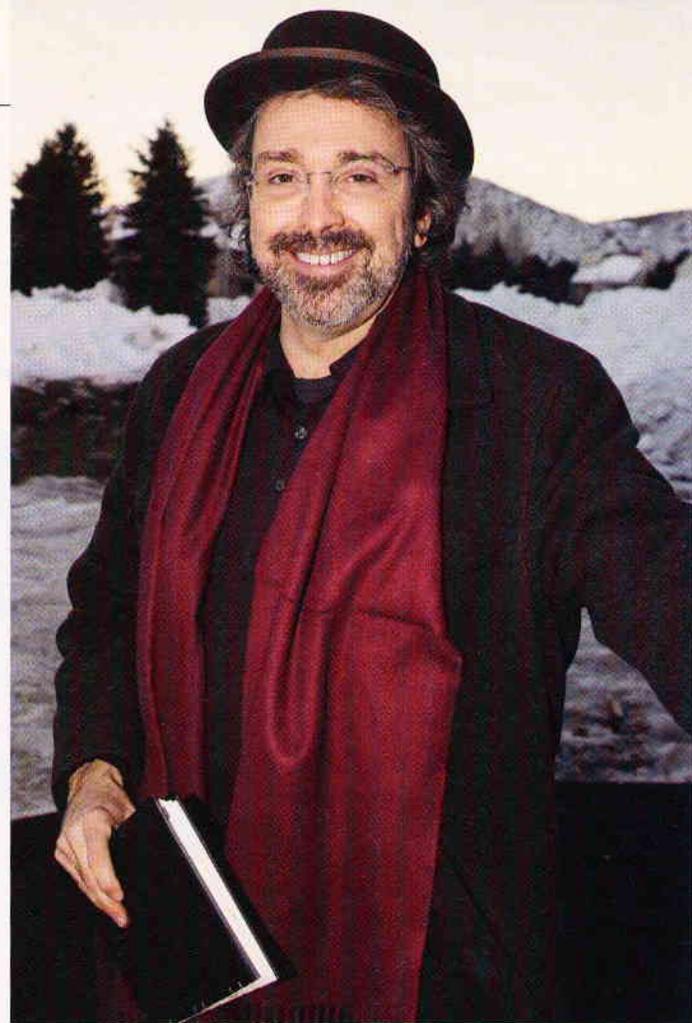


The prime of Craig Lucas

Penning plays, directing movies—now he's writing the book for a major musical. Is there anything Craig Lucas can't do? **By Michael Giltz**



"I hate breaking the law," moans New York-based writer Craig Lucas about talking to *The Advocate* on his cell phone while driving to a film premiere. Nobody catches him in the act, though. Lately his life is too charmed for that sort of thing.

Lucas, who turns 54 on April 30, has enjoyed wide success with plays like the recently revived *Reckless* and screenplays like the Oscar-nominated *Longtime Companion*. His personal life is in fine shape too, thanks to a happy six-year relationship.

But with all that life behind him, Lucas is peaking only now. He made his film directorial debut at Sundance with *The Dying Gaul*, which he adapted from his own play. His hugely ambitious drama *Singing Forest*—a 210-minute opus involving Freud, Nazis, gay love, and redemption—was a hit at the Long Wharf in New Haven, Conn. His adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is premiering this summer at Seattle's Intiman Theatre.

At the moment, all eyes are on *The Light in the Piazza*, Lucas's first original musical, opening April 18 at Lincoln Center. A collaboration with lyricist-composer Adam Guettel—a New York

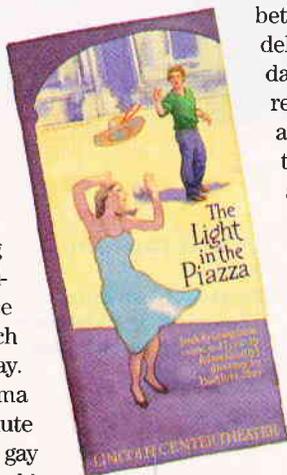
critical favorite who also happens to be the grandson of Richard Rodgers—*Piazza* stands in stark contrast to this season's broad musical comedies like *Spamalot* and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*.

Based on a novella by Elizabeth Spencer, *Piazza* tells the delicate story of a mother and daughter vacationing in Florence. The daughter falls for a well-born local Italian boy; the mother wavers between support and resistance; a heartbreaking secret spins the story.

Says Lucas: "It seems the perfect paradigm for what all parents and children go through. Letting go, accepting the otherness of who your parents are and who your children are,

recognizing that you can't keep them safe and cannot live through their lives. [The story] spoke to me. I felt like I fell into a pot of jam."

Lucas is just as enthusiastic about Guettel. "I've always wanted to write something with Stephen Sondheim; we've bounced a few ideas around but never found anything," he says. "But I



feel I've found an ideal collaborator in Adam. He's an absolutely meticulous, almost maniacally concentrated, focused, brilliant, adaptable colleague."

What happens after *Piazza* opens? More theater projects, of course. And Lucas also plans to direct another film. Soon.

"I loved it, I loved it, I loved it," says Lucas about directing. "I would do it again in a second. I have not always taken the best care of myself or others. I think I've had a reckless life in a way. But since I started directing movies, I have to take better care of myself because you can't help support other people who are having crises if you're not healthy and centered. It's like I found a whole different part of myself, and thank God—I'm 53, almost 54. It's about time." ■

Giltz is a regular contributor to several periodicals, including the New York Post.



Read an interview with Peter Sarsgaard, star of Craig Lucas's *The Dying Gaul*, at www.advocate.com.