

t h e a t e r

# Caged heat

*The Producers'* hilarious Gary Beach gets his name above the title in *La Cage aux Folles*  
By Michael Giltz

“I am what I am. I don’t want praise. I don’t want pity.” Those iconic lines—a signal moment in both musical theater and gay history—are ringing out again with the first Broadway revival of *La Cage aux Folles*, opening December 9.

Gary Beach, who won the Tony for his hilarious turn as fey director Roger De Bris in *The Producers*, plays *La Cage*’s Albin—the drag diva with a maternal streak portrayed by Nathan Lane in *The Birdcage*, Mike Nichols’s 1996 film adaptation.

Beach feels the thrill and the responsibility of that song and this show. “When George Hearn sang it [when the show first hit Broadway in 1983],” says Beach, “it was the first time—George, of course, wasn’t gay—where a gay character stood up and said, ‘This is what I am. And I don’t hate myself, and I really don’t care if you don’t like what I’m doing. I’m strong enough to say that.’ That was a pretty incredible moment, and it’s still valid now.”

The first time he performed the song during auditions, Beach was a wreck. “You need an intermission after singing ‘I Am What I Am,’” he laughs. He knew the show was great fun, but any questions he had as to its importance soon vanished.

“When I got the call about this revival, my first thought was, *Does the world need to see La Cage aux Folles now?*” says Beach, who also scored a

Tony nomination for his turn as the candlestick Lumiere in *Beauty and the Beast*. “And I swear to you, maybe a week later the whole gay marriage-

defiant “I am gay” songs around, Beach’s own professional coming-out was decidedly low-key. He casually mentioned his partner of 15 years (“We used to be lovers; now we’re partners”) during interviews for *The Producers* and realized while reading the articles that he’d come out.

*La Cage aux Folles*’ coming-out promises to be equally thrilling, with numerous tweaks keeping it fresh. “The story is still there,” says Beach, who will also be filming the movie version of *The Producers* in February. “You can’t change that story. It’s magnificent. But I was sent the script about two weeks before rehearsal. I opened it to the first scene, which happened to be the scene I auditioned with, and I almost didn’t recognize it. It goes in a different way. It’s a totally different entrance; a totally different relationship between Georges [Daniel Davis] and Albin. The music is very much the same. It’s a great Jerry Herman score. Why bother with it?”

Beach is hopeful it can be just as exciting an opening as the original was for him in 1983. “I was there the night before the opening,” says the 57-year-old actor, “at the very final preview. It was very thrilling. At the time—it was 20 years ago—people said, ‘Oh, my God, Gary, you’d be so good in that part. Too bad you’re too young for it.’ Well, they can’t say that anymore.” ■

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



Birds of a feather, nesting together: Beach (left), Davis

New Paltz–San Francisco thing happened. I thought, *Oh, my God, this actually means more now than it did even then.*”

For an actor singing one of the most