

'AWAKENING' TO ROCK

7/8/07 Mr. Paul May
"Spring" Tony winner John Gallagher brings his band to Joe's Pub

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

John Gallagher is used to rocking out in strange places.

He's belting out rock tunes on Broadway in "Spring Awakening." He met one of his best friends by spontaneously performing a duet of a Broadway show tune at a high school house party. And his rock band, Old Springs Pike, developed an early fan base by heading to Unitarian churches and performing raucous folk music at Sunday services.

But it's still going to take the 23-year-old actor a little while getting used to having just rocked the Tony Awards and winning a Best Featured Actor award for his shock-headed performance as Moritz, the doomed student in the critically acclaimed hit musical.

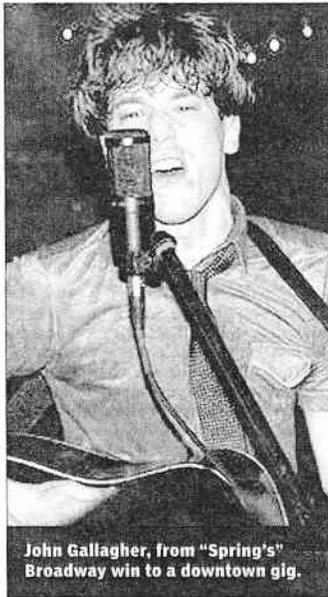
"The eight minutes after you win are some of the most ecstatic, unbelievable emotional moments I have ever experienced," says Gallagher, who jokes about taking his picture backstage with fellow winner Billy Crudup while trying not to cry. He was most relieved about not embarrassing himself.

"I knew there was another John in my category — John Cullum — so I prepared myself: 'If you hear "John," don't go crazy, don't get up immediately, just wait for it and make sure you hear the last name.'"

He heard the last name he was hoping for, and now Gallagher — who has an upcoming role in the Kenneth Lonergan movie "Margaret" — finds himself a sought-after actor, even though he walked out of a "Spring Awakening" audition because he was more committed to his rock band and didn't feel he belonged there.

Naturally, his success on Broadway will bring a lot more attention to Old Springs Pike, which performs at Joe's Pub tomorrow night and at the Zipper Theater on W. 37th St. in August.

Gallagher's parents are folk musicians, and he's a self-confessed "harmony slut," so it's no surprise Old Springs Pike is a rootsy affair whose trademark covers include Tom Petty and Bob Dylan. But they're not too cool to admit the band name came from the street one of them lived on, a name that had to be tweaked because it was too similar to Billy Joel's 1971 debut album, "Cold Spring Harbor."



John Gallagher, from "Spring's" Broadway win to a downtown gig.

Gallagher had watched his fellow band members performing in their own band in high school, thrilled to hear other people embracing the sounds of Crosby, Stills and Nash and The Band. But they were much older — 16, instead of 15 — and it was a while before they all connected.

John bonded with James Cleare by being tutored in the importance of Billy Joel. He and Heather Robb sparked after doing a duet of the Beatles classic "If I Fell."

And James Smith was the guy Gallagher impressed by starting up that impromptu duet at a party. (The song was from "The Secret Garden," a musical Smith was performing for school.)

Then they went their separate ways — as high school kids will — until the four members found themselves all living in New York at the same time.

"Of course, the guitars came out and the nights of drinking and singing began," says Gallagher. "And three weeks later, we had three songs we were all really excited about."

Now Gallagher has a Tony; the band's steadily increasing fan base has a lot of new members, and Old Springs Pike has some new songs to perform. Gallagher is committed to "Spring Awakening" through November, and the future — "Spring Awakening" in London? An Old Springs Pike CD? — is wide open.

But one step at a time for Gallagher, who is still new enough to recognize with awe, "Joe's Pub will be the biggest place we've played in New York!" ♦

High school pals living in New York start a band!