

Talent

# Hello Yet Again



**B**roadway is currently giving the people what they want in the form of lavish, lumbering shows that take years to mount but rarely attempt to stretch the boundaries of musical theater. Happily, one of the theater's most promising talents, composer **Michael John LaChuisa**, manages to be both prolific and consistently surprising—if consistently *Off Broadway*. In the past fourteen months alone, he's mounted three shows. *First Lady Suite* was a musical-theater piece that focused on three presidential wives; *Hello Again*, based on Arthur Schnitzler's *La Ronde*, linked a musical daisy chain of lovers. Now he returns to the Public with *The Petrified Prince*, a ribald tale based on an Ingmar Bergman script and directed by Harold Prince. "It's a very simple story," explains LaChuisa. "A mythical European kingdom, Slavonia, is ruled by a queen, Katarina, who had been a whore. Her husband, the king, dies of a heart attack, and her son is set to inherit the crown.

However, her son is a complete catatonic, a real emotional wreck because his mother is such a horrible human being." Writing for an imperious character like the queen was a breeze. "I love Katarina," LaChuisa says. "She's a cross between Leona Helmsley and Nancy Reagan." Also in the works is another opera libretto—a welcome source of cash, but hardly his favorite medium. "Most opera houses have this ridiculous working schedule," he says. "You meet with the director *once*. Two years later, you meet with the director again and that's the week of dress rehearsals. When I go to an opera house, I feel like saying, 'Please treat me as if I were dead.' You get much more respect."



MICHAEL GILTZ