

A high-spirited, divine 'Altar Boyz' inspires at Stoneham Theatre

By SHEILA BARTH
barths@comcast.net

The Altar Boyz are beckoning you to come to Stoneham Theatre, not only to enjoy their highly energetic performance, but to heed God's call and save your souls during the one-act, 80-minute, off-Broadway, award-winning musical hit spoof that targets boy bands and Christian performance groups.

Since its debut at the New York Musical Theater Festival in 2004, the show has amassed Altarholics followers.

The audience's "Altar Boyz" interaction begins even before theatergoers enter the theater space. In the lobby, there's a confessional box, where people may submit their "confessions".

This "divinely-inspired" musical show-within-a-show features five Altar Boyz - Matthew, Mark, Luke, Abraham and Juan- who the show with a high-energy, soul-raising, rocking, introductory song, "We Are the Altar Boyz." They say they came to Stoneham Theatre, the last stop of their Raise to Praise hallelujah song-and-dance inspirational performance, to save lost, troubled souls. "We're gonna alter your lives," they pro-



claim. "y'know who's in the house? God's in the house!" They won't quit until their Soul Sensor, a family-friendly, digital display meter, indicates all theatergoers' souls are on the right path to salvation.

Driving their individual messages home, each Altar Boy relates his God-ordained "call," through a non-visual, thunderous, voice, or via cell phone.

Besides co-directing the show with Tyler Rosati, choreographer Ceit Zweil, has created a non-stop, high-energy, romping, rock-n-rolling, inspirational production, in which the Boyz genuinely seem committed to saving our souls. "God put the rhythm in

me," they sing.

Their enthusiastic, fervor radiates throughout the theater. They make individual eye contact, dance in the aisles at times. They even take a lucky young lady on stage, while Matthew serenades her in his solo, (There's) Something About You".

Although some theatergoers may be put off by the lyrics' Christian content - think evangelical, inspirational, spiritual gatherings - theatergoers must remember the show is farcical. The lyrics inject clever play on words that aren't as outrageously irreverent, and fiendishly funny as "The Book of Mormon," but in the same genre.

Set on Jenna Lord's snazzy,

tri-level stage, with church-like arches, an altar with neon-blue illuminated cross, and the show's four terrific musicians, including musical director Matthew Stern playing keyboard 1, visibly seated on an uppermost, above-stage platform. Together, musicians and performers make glorious music, from spoof inspirational, to Hispanic, rock 'n' roll and rap.

Also eye-and ear-catching are Jeff Adelberg's battery of lighting effects and John Stone's sound effects.

"We're the Altar Boyz, we're gonna alter your mind," they pledge musically in their theme song.

Handsome leader Matthew, (Michael Levesque), along

with Mark (Michael Jennings Mahoney) the sweetly gay, effeminate buddy who secretly harbors feelings for Matthew; Luke (Sean Mitchell Crosley), a toughie who was detained at a "training center" for awhile because, "Yo, I was 'exhausted' (detained, as in busted); and Juan (Ricardo D. Holguin) the Mexicano who was abandoned by his parents on the church steps and has desperately sought to know his real parents, only to learn they're dead. Juan tearfully declares "La Vida Eternal," rousingly supported by the ensemble.

There's Abraham (Bryan Miner) the Jew, too, who despite his religion, feels he belongs with the Altar Boyz. Wearing his Star of David kipot and decorated T-shirt, Abraham touches theatergoers' hearts with his fantastic musical declaration, "Everybody Fits (in God's family)" because God loves everybody equally.

Portraying Mark, Mahoney seems divinely inspired, too, during his soaring solo, "Epiphany," that brings down the house.

With each song and soul-sensor check time, the number of souls requiring salvation drops, eventually leav-

BOX OFFICE

One-act, multi-award winning, 80-minute musical spoof, music, lyrics by Gary Adler and Michael Patrick Walker, book by Kevin Del Aguila, based on a concept by Ken Davenport and Marc Kessler, appearing at Stoneham Theatre through April 9: Wednesday, March 29, April 5, April 29, at 2 p.m.; Thursday, 7:30 p.m.; Friday, 8 p.m.; Saturday, 3 and 8 p.m., 395 Main St., Stoneham. \$5-\$55; seniors, \$45-\$50; students with valid ID, \$20. Stonehamtheatre.org.

ing only four on the meter, leading to a shocking revelation among the ensemble.

Together, cast members are delightful. They seem to enjoy being together on stage, and their spirit of camaraderie, friendship and commitment emanates to theatergoers.

While the boys sing about lifting spirits, freeing and saving souls, "Altar Boyz" commitment is bringing family fun to all ages.