

Class Act

This month's world premiere of *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion The Musical* is the latest in The 5th Avenue Theatre's collaborative string of Broadway hits and hopefuls

by TIM APPELO

photograph by HAYLEY YOUNG



THE 5TH AVENUE THEATRE has more seats than any theater on Broadway, but Broadway sells a lot more seats, thanks in part to the shows The 5th exports. Its more than 20,000 subscribers may be the nation's hungriest audience for never-before-seen, Broadway-bound musicals. "We've created 18 new musicals in 17 years," says The 5th's artistic director and executive producer, David Armstrong. Nine of those went to Broadway—including *Shrek* and Disney's *Aladdin*—racking up 15 Tony Awards, among them two for Best Musical, for *Hairspray* and *Memphis*.

Hopes are high on both coasts for the latest potential Tony magnet about to launch at The 5th, the 20th-anniversary musicalization of the 1997 classic girl-power film *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion*. "I can't predict a hit," says Armstrong, "but it all depends on the team behind the show."

The 5th's hit makers can take inspiration from the ultimate team players: the show's two best-friend characters. "Michele is a calming energy for Romy's wildness," says Cortney Wolfson, who plays Romy. "She doesn't care what anybody thinks except Romy. If Romy's happy, Michele's happy." For some 20,000 Seattleites and Lord knows how many New Yorkers, this could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship.

Romy and Michele runs June 8–July 2 at The 5th Avenue Theatre, downtown; 5thavenue.org

The *Romy and Michele* team includes (pictured from left) Los Angeles-based composers Gwendolyn Sanford and Brandon Jay (Weeds, *Orange Is the New Black*); The 5th Avenue's artistic director David Armstrong; LA-based director Kristin Hanggi (*Rock of Ages*); New York City-based actress Cortney Wolfson (*Legally Blonde*, *Kinky Boots*) as Romy and LA-based actress Stephanie Renee Wall (*Frozen*) as Michele; music director Tim Symons of Issaquah's Village Theatre in his 5th Avenue debut; LA-based writer Robin Schiff (seated), who wrote the play, screenplay and musical; and musical choreographer Peggy Hickey (*Anastasia*).

Set decor by GATHER DESIGN COMPANY and SIMPLY BY TAMARA NICOLE WEDDINGS AND EVENTS

Hair, makeup and grooming by GENE JUAREZ SALONS & SPAS CREATIVECOLLAB

"Luscious" dress on "Michele" from LULY YANG COUTURE

All other wardrobe items are subjects' own.

PHOTOGRAPHED AT SEATTLE ACADEMY, APRIL 3, 2017