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PLAY BY PLAY

More Musicals Rockin' Their Way to the Stage

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Now that "Movin' Out," the dance-theater piece featuring the songs of Billy Joel, has won its share of glowing reviews, it seems that new musicals that pluck their songs from the rock canon have received both the critical and the popular stamp of approval. (The ABBA-fueled "Mamma Mia!" has remained, since it opened more than a year ago, one of Broadway's biggest hits.) After that kind of success, more new shows bolstered by familiar rock songs are on the way. Here are a few:

In London, "We Will Rock You," a sci-fi musical featuring the songs of Queen, is the top-selling show in the city, despite some less-than-stellar reviews. Directed by Christopher Renshaw (whose revival of "The King and I" was a hit on Broadway in 1996) and written by Ben Elton (who is already at work on a sequel), "We Will Rock You" tells the futuristic tale of a group of rock rebels known as the Bohemians (they of the famous Rhapsody). "We Will Rock You" plans to rock New York in mid-2004.

Also in London, "Our House," featuring the tunes of the 1980s ska band Madness (and directed by Broadway regular Matthew Warchus), opened on Monday. The romantic comedy, a "Sliding Doors"-style story about two teenagers, earned middling reviews but is selling fairly well. It's too early to say if "Our House" will make it across the pond, but in the words of one aide to the producers, "Never say never."

Closer to home, an American rocker - Frank Black, formerly of the late, great Boston band The Pixies - has become the unlikely basis for a new "rock-u-drama" by Josh Frank. "Teenager of the Year," which will include music from The Pixies and from Black's solo career, aims to use Black's biography to tell the larger story of "how alternative rock found its way onto the map," Frank said. The show looks to open Off-Broadway in summer 2003.

Going, Staying, Casting

Two closings, an extension and a few casting notes: "Harlem Song," the musical celebration of Harlem culture currently running at the Apollo, has posted a provisional closing notice. The show has engendered much good will but not enough cash; it will play its last show on Sunday if the production can't raise \$300,000 before then.

Snuffed by some dire reviews, "Burning Blue," the military drama starring Chad Lowe, announced that it too will close on Sunday.

The Signature Theatre's popular revival of "Burn This" has extended its run, with Elisabeth Shue and Peter Sarsgaard replacing original stars Catherine Keener and Edward Norton. Shue (nominated for an

Academy Award for her performance in the 1995 film "Leaving Las Vegas") and Sarsgaard (maybe best known for his scary work in the 1999 movie "Boys Don't Cry") will begin performances in "Burn This" on Nov. 20. For now, the run is open-ended; tickets are on sale until February.

In the Sam Mendes revival of "Gypsy," arriving at the Shubert in April, young actresses Tammy Blanchard (an Emmy winner for her portrayal of a young Judy Garland in the miniseries "Life With Judy Garland: Me and My Shadows") and Kate Reinders will play the two daughters to Bernadette Peters' Mama Rose.

And the Roundabout's revival of "Nine," the musical based on Fellini's "8½," comes with a slew of stars attached, although none of their names has quite been set in stone. Antonio Banderas (as the filmmaker protagonist) and Jane Krakowski (as one of his many women) are the closest-to-confirmed participants on the list; other attached names include Chita Rivera, Mary Stuart Masterson and Laura Benanti. The production, slated to start performances in March, will be directed by David Leveaux (the British director last on Broadway with "Betrayal" in 2000).

Meanwhile, a couple of high-profile (and much buzzed-about) Broadway offerings confirmed their spring schedules. "Take Me Out," the Broadway transfer of the hit play now running Off-Broadway at the Public Theater, announced that previews would begin Feb. 4 for an opening night of Feb. 27 at the Walter Kerr Theater. No word yet on whether there will be casting changes; negotiations with the actors are still in progress.

And the revival of August Wilson's "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," mentioned in last week's column, has also picked a date: It opens on Feb. 6 at the Royale. The production will star Whoopi Goldberg (as blues singer Ma Rainey) and Charles S. Dutton, who, as the trumpeter Levee, will reprise his role in the play's original Broadway incarnation in the mid-'80s.

A Time for 'Vampires'

Appropriately enough for All Hallows' Eve, this week's big seller is "Dance of the Vampires," the new musical comedy that features the return to Broadway of Michael Crawford, the original Phantom of the Opera. Directed by John Rando ("Urinetown") and featuring a rock score by Jim Steinman, "Dance of the Vampires" took in a whopping \$730,000 in its first full week of previews. The production opens Nov. 21 at the Minskoff Theater; for tickets (which range in price to \$25 to \$95), call Ticketmaster at 212-307-4100.

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