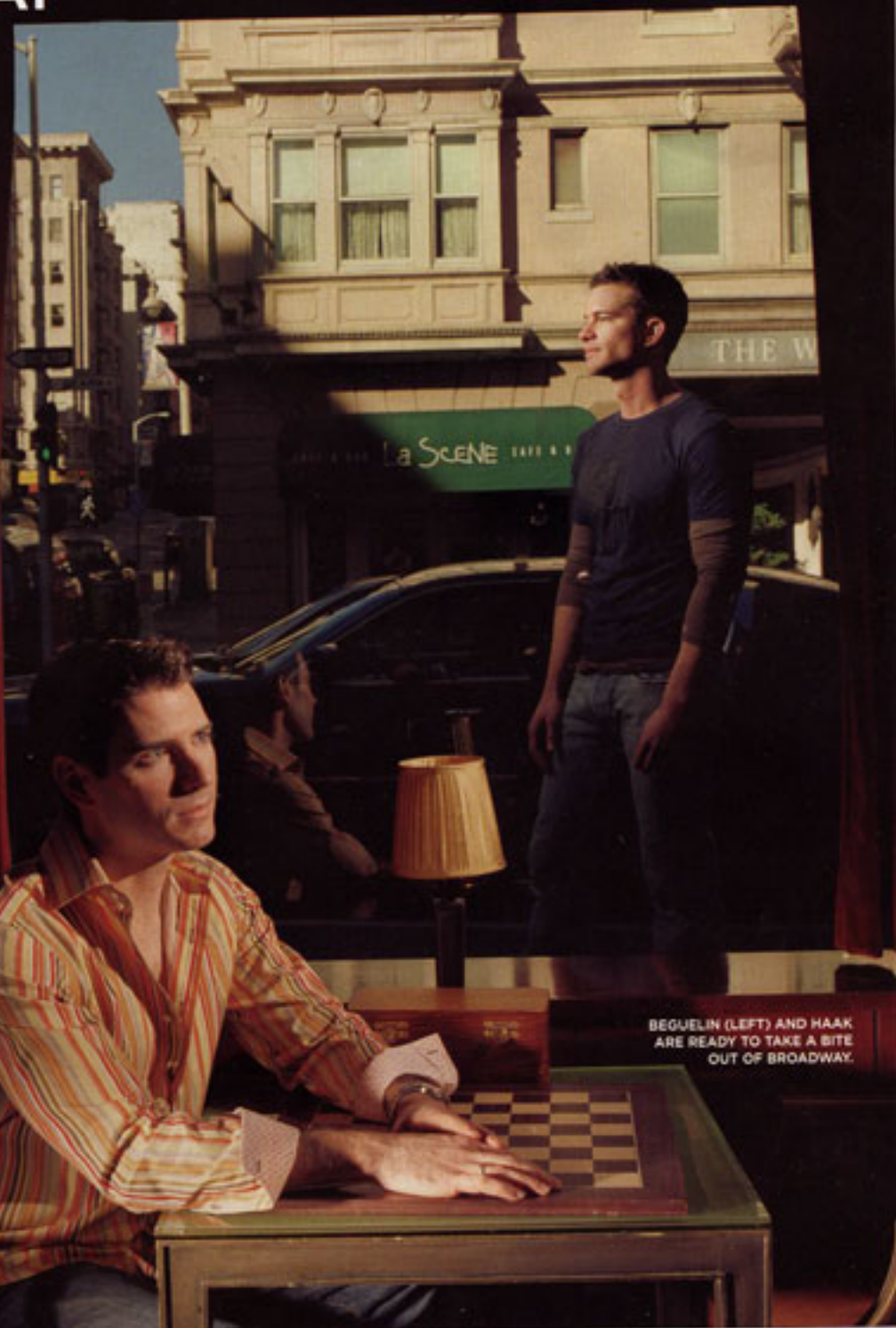


THEATER, CELEBRITY, TELEVISION, THE MIX, PETS, REVIEWS, MUSIC

THEATER
**BROADWAY
 BABES**

THE ARTISTRY
 BEHIND TWO
 OF SPRING'S
 BIGGEST MUSICALS

SCORES OF NEW ARRIVALS WILL BE singing the lullaby of Broadway come the last week of March. The musical *Tarzan* swings in, along with shows featuring Cyndi Lauper, Alan Cumming, and some Broadway newcomer named Julia Roberts. As if that weren't enough: Separated by three blocks, with previews beginning within five days of each other, are two highly anticipated new musicals that, on the surface, couldn't be more different. One is an



BEGUELIN (LEFT) AND HAAK ARE READY TO TAKE A BITE OUT OF BROADWAY.

adaptation of Anne Rice's gothic Vampire Chronicles series that begins in 18th-century New Orleans; the other is a musical take on an Adam Sandler movie set firmly in 1985 New Jersey. One's source material is dripping with gay subtext, yet its counterpart couldn't be straighter. And one has as its composer a flamboyant gay icon on his fourth show, while the other has music penned by a straight Broadway neophyte. But what *Lestat* and *The Wedding Singer* have in common are the Broadway debuts of two out, hot, young creative artists. As you might expect, both of them are thrilled.

"It can be overwhelming," says Chad Beguelin, 36, who wrote *The Wedding Singer*'s lyrics to Matthew Sklar's music and shares libretto credit with the film's author, Tim Herlihy. "Every time Matt and I start to get really nervous or feel the pressure, we try to stay focused on making the show as good as we possibly can."

Lestat's musical director, 29-year-old Brad Haak, feels the same way: "I can't worry about how many millions of dollars are at stake; I just have to do the best work I can do." With composer Elton John absent for much of the rehearsal process, Haak's experience has been far from typical. "It was an unbelievable education," raves Haak, whom John has called "sex on legs." "In a sense I acted as Elton's ears and eyes. If you want to involve the talents of one of the greatest musical geniuses alive today, you go in knowing that he can't always be there."

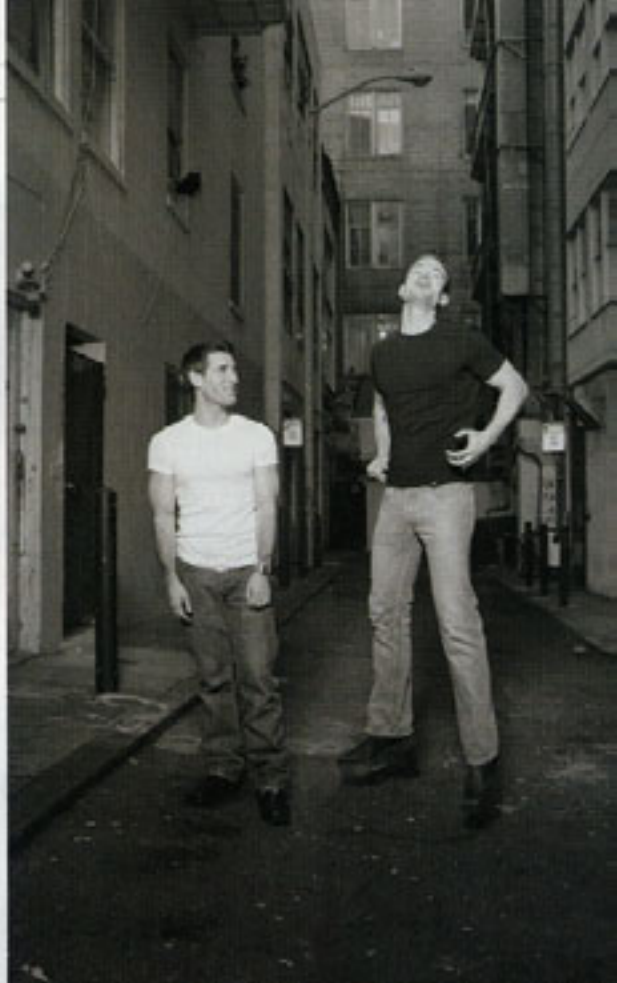
Both Beguelin and Haak hail from Illinois ("It's the water," quips Beguelin) and live in New York City. Haak is single; Beguelin has been partnered for 13 years. "He's a CPA," says Beguelin of his boyfriend. "It's great. He can figure out the tip on a bill." Backstage, however, you could say Beguelin is on his own.

"The first day we all sat down to meet, I made some reference to *No, No, Nanette* and everyone stared at me blankly," Beguelin says, laughing. "I went 'Oh, my God, I'm the only gay guy in the room. How did this happen?'" Minority status hasn't stopped his influence, however. "I definitely enjoyed adding some gayness to a very straight show," he says. "The character of George [the band's Boy George wannabe] is really fleshed out in this. And we don't make an issue of George being gay. People accept him for who he is, and that makes me happy."

Lestat, on the other hand, has less gay content than you might imagine.

"It's not particularly present in the show," said Haak at the conclusion of the San Francisco tryout. "[But moving forward] that sexuality is one of the things we want to add and embrace more. I think it's going to add elements to the show that are missing."

Now, if only the folks at *Tarzan* felt the same way. **Eddie Shapiro**



GROOMING: BEVYAN DOERING © ARTISTS UNITED

