

# Remembering 'the cologne of dead friends'

By Davida Singer

Across from the Actors' Playhouse, on Seventh Ave. S., Robert Cabell and his "buddy," co-producer Evette Stark, enjoy a late bite, and discuss their new show, "2 Hearts Over Easy". Music, book, lyrics, and direction are all by Cabell.

"This is a very strange show," he relates. "It's been brewing in my mind for a few years.

"It's based on my having brunch with three dear, female friends -- one of whom is starring in the production, Maggie Wirth. '2 Hearts' is only eight months old, from first draft to here. I finished the first rough draft in the middle of January, 1994, started rehearsing in February, and opened in March at Don't Tell Mama. I've changed a lot. Every week many songs would go in and out, and I've continued to do this until previews. I insisted in not being in the show in the beginning. Four different actors were rehearsed and hired to do the lead role of Jimmy during a two-month period, before I stepped in to do it the day before we opened. The show went from the

original four-week run, to six, to eight, to 12, and I kept trying to get someone else to do the role. Finally, in desperation, I closed the show to get out of it, because I couldn't direct!"

While Cabell was in it, the producers came to him and said they wanted to do "2 Hearts" Off Broadway.

"My best friend, Marvin Gardens, is the choreographer, and another co-producer," says Cabell. "This show has been looked out after. All of us have lost many friends and loved ones to AIDS in the last few years, and this play deals with that very deeply. I feel it's being taken care of by my own little group of angels. A great deal of the show is autobiographical. There are four actors. Randy Weiss plays 15 characters. Maggie Wirth plays six. And all three women who the show was based on, left New York, and wound up back in town to see "2 Hearts" in cabaret on the same week."

Cabell and Stark say that the unlikely availability of the Actors' Playhouse "just happened."

They add "there's an enormous amount

of love and commitment in this production."

"The play is about two friends -- a divorced mother, and a gay man in his late thirties, facing modern life," Cabell explains. "It's a metropolitan musical. It's very cutting edge, irreverent, and loving. We deal with suicide, emerging homosexuality, betrayal, infidelity. And it's an up show!"

The production work itself has been handled like a family operation.

"We've done everything," Stark reports. "From raising every bit of funding, to blowing up balloons, designing and printing circulars, and organizing the Playbill."

According to Cabell, the show has been selling out by word of mouth.

"We've gotten standing ovations, people asking where they can get the music. It's non-traditional. It's like dragging the audience on stage, like a Bugs Bunny cartoon, and then throwing them back. It's extremely fast paced. The set is covered with \$8,000 worth of Versace. Marvin knows him, so he got a deal. It's a beautiful set, built by the Julliard scenic

shop. Everything was sent up from Atlanta."

Cabell's own roots are in Oregon. Now 39, he started singing concerts at 14. He studied theater at the University of Oregon, did regional theater, tours, and finally arrived in New York in 1978, to write. His twin brother helped him launch his first Off Broadway show. Credits include "Pretty Faces", and "The Large & Lovely Musical".

"The event in this show is that it's almost impossible for a gay man in his thirties to go in any crowd, and not see ghosts or smell the cologne of a dead friend," says Cabell. "Day to day, you're surrounded by images of people you've lost. It changes you -- surviving so much loss. "2 Hearts Over Easy" allows an audience to remember the loss, to cry, and then it grips you by the shoulders and says, 'Wake up and go on.'"

*"2 Hearts Over Easy," at Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S; Tue.-Fri, 8 P.M., Sat., 7 & 10 P.M.; Sun., 3 & 7 P.M.; \$15. 691-6226.*

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