



pleasers that stay quarantined in the sleepless city until some locally-based production company elsewhere in the country recasts the magic for the rest of us. All Shook Up and Andrews Brothers are just two recent examples of the many musicals to be regionally premiered first here in Long Beach; Rent, the mid-90's rock opera sensation born in NYC and modeled after Puccini's La Boheme, is another regional first-run production that will "light your candle" this coming December—Hindenburg-style.

But MTW's rousing stage extends much further than the Carpenter Performing Arts Center. Beginning in 1991, as a guttural reflex to devastating educational budget cuts (sound familiar?) at La Mirada K-12 schools, MTW created the Youth Cultural Enrichment Program (YCEP), a tremendous lifeline for kids facing a creative vacuum as various school-based music and drama departments started winking out one by one. MTW employs a two-way street approach with YCEP: bus kids in from area schools to attend full-length musical productions

(usually a special matinee) at CPAC; and send actors out to respective schools to perform 40-minute abbreviated versions of various musicals, afterwards interacting with children in costume for engaging and educational dialog about musical theater.

We Tell Their Story, written specifically for schools, paraphrases Broadway musicals based on true-life stories, people and historical events (1776 tells about the American Revolution, Les Miserables tells about the French Revolution, etc.) in order to supercharge social studies. Last year MTW performed for over 10,000 local area K-12 school kids.

On musical.org, Musical Theatre West's website, readers will find a wealth of information about past, current and upcoming musical productions, youth outreach program details, travel club tours to NYC, special dining events, season tickets and so much more. ■

Photos courtesy of Musical Theatre West.

KENNETH COPELAND MINISTRIES



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ON STAGE



# MUSICAL THEATRE WEST PERFORMS

WRITTEN BY DARRIN LITTLE

ALL SHOOK UP

**M**usical theatre proverb: "When the emotion becomes too strong for speech, you sing; when it becomes too strong for song, you dance."

Musical Theatre West (MTW) saved 15,000 Long Beach performing arts fans from the flying shrapnel of theater bankruptcy back in 1996. That's the year local residents witnessed Long Beach Civic Light Opera (LBCLO) — a 28-year guiding light of the Long Beach cultural arts scene — reluctantly drop its thespian curtain for the last time in the face of terminal economic hardships. MTW, at that time a close performing cousin in La Mirada and a brother-in-arms to the LBCLO (they had an established tradition of sharing performers), stepped into the breach and invited all LBCLO ticket holders (17,000 at the time of offer) to come up to La Mirada and present their

ticket for a seat at MTW's current production. Of those 17,000 ticket holders, a whopping 15,000 unremitting fans said "yes!"

The overwhelming response to that offer encouraged MTW to start producing shows at the Carpenter Performing Arts Center (CPAC) in Long Beach the following year. Soon after, they officially moved their operations permanently from La Mirada to our devoted song-and-dance port city. Paul Garman, Executive Director/Producer for MTW beams: "We have a vibrant cultural arts community here in Long Beach, and we were just ecstatic to be a part of it!"

Created in 1952 as the Whittier Civic Light Opera, MTW remains the fastest growing arts organization in the Long Beach area. Recent tallies chart 60,000 people coming

through the doors every year (some dedicated subscribers come from as far away as Arizona and Nevada). 2009 finds MTW in the midst of its 11th season at CPAC, with four fresh productions. Those hungry for that *Je ne sais quoi* feeling that only the musical can bring should attend May's production of *Forbidden Planet*, a hilarious parody factory that irreverently celebrates familiar Broadway hits like *Annie*, *Cats*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Les Miserables* and *Phantom of the Opera*. This "Saturday Night Live—Broadway-style" treatment promises to be the comic relief we'll all need after this tax season.

With perpetually fresh, scintillating performances, MTW often has the distinction of staging unique, regional premieres of otherwise nationally touring productions, especially those NYC Broadway-spawned crowd