

Chazz Palminteri will bring his one-man show "A Bronx Tale" to the Rialto, beginning perfs Oct. 4.

Legit

Laurie Metcalf will star in David Mamet's "November," bowing at Broadway's Ethel Barrymore on Jan. 17.



N.Y. tuner fest turns up the volume ...

By MARK BLANKENSHIP

Now that it's grown up, the New York Musical Theater Festival is trying to grow out.

From Sept. 17 to Oct. 7, the fest will mount its fourth season of developing tuners, bringing its total number of productions to more than 100. That benchmark suggests the event has moved past its "young upstart" phase. With the fall machine running smoothly — not to mention an increasing number of NYMF shows transferring to commercial runs — organizers are aiming to introduce programming throughout the rest of the year.

"We want to make it clear that we're an organization and not just this annual event," says exec director Kris Stewart. "That can be hard for some people to understand."

In other words, he wants NYMF to be known as an incubator for a wide variety of musical projects and talents, not just a breeding ground for poten-

tial commercial hits. And while an annual budget of just under a million dollars means expansion must have limits, Stewart and exec producer Isaac Robert Hurwitz are stretching funds as far as they will go.

This year saw the dawn of a spring concert series. The four themed events — including Broadway Battle of the Bands, in which Rialto stars like "Spring Awakening's" John Gallagher Jr. performed with their side projects — were designed to be part fund-raisers, part explorations of how tuners collide with rock and pop.

Fest also has commissioned two pieces for a project called "The Broadcast Musicals." The end result will be short, radio-style tuners distributed as podcasts. Creatives include Anthony King ("Gutenberg! The Musical") and Gary Adler ("Altar Boyz").

Podcasts should arrive in April, and next year may also see the preem of "Innovative



"I See London, I See France (The Underwear Musical)" gets fest exposure.

Leisure," a co-commission with Ensemble Studio Theater and the Sloan Foundation about the early history of the videogame industry.

These projects join the special events that have always run concurrently with

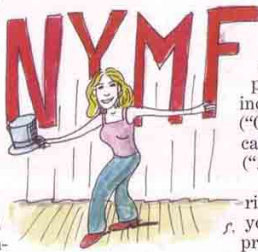
the fall festival. This season's extracurricular programming includes two dance-music pieces and a puppet tuner based on the movie "Die Hard."

But don't confuse volume with grand scale. "As far as commissions, you're talking hundreds of dollars, not thousands," admits Stewart. "But we do it out of a spirit of experimentation."

Nor are those experiments expected to reap great rewards. Though it may not be NYMF's only endeavor, the fall fest is undoubtedly its bread and butter. "We do rely on ticket income to survive," Hurwitz says. Last year's ticket sales were up to 36,000, a 65% increase over 2005.

And though NYMF doesn't take a cut when its alums transfer to other theaters, audience awareness of the festival can only be stoked by the increasing number of successful grads. This winter, "Next to Normal" (formerly titled "Feeling Electric"), about a troubled suburban family, will bow at Gotham's Second Stage. Williamstown Theater Festival just closed a production of wedding-gone-wrong comedy "Party Come

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Fest tunes up for more

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Here," and "Will & Grace" star Sean Hayes recently participated in a L.A. reading of "Nerds: A Musical Software Satire," which played at Philadelphia Theater Company last January.

Plus, there's always "Altar Boyz," the long-running hit that has become to NYMF what "Urinetown" is to the Fringe.

Among this year's high-profile enticements are "The Yellow Wood," a fantasy-drama about a Korean teenager directed by actor B.D. Wong; "The Last Starfighter," an

adaptation of the 1980s sci-fi movie; and "I See London, I See France (The Underwear Musical)," about a jilted ad exec who falls for an underwear model.

Both auds and pundits will likely speculate on which of this year's shows will get picked up, and that gossip could stack up against NYMF's expansion plans.

"The ongoing challenge we face is monitoring expectations," says Hurwitz. "If quick transfers were all we were about, we'd quickly become a shallow shopping mall."

But could pulling attention

away from the flagship fest dilute its impact? Stewart argues the opposite. "Hopefully, these additional shows and programs will help sustain a healthy work flow," he says. "It's hard for an organization to thrive on such a feast-or-famine schedule."

Plus, funders might give more generously if they see that NYMF doesn't just die from November through August.

"When we've only got three weeks to prove the value of what we do, to prove the value of doing R&D for musical theater, then we can easily lose people," Stewart adds. "If someone misses us in the fall, we don't want to wait an entire year before we can bring them back."