

# Gotta go to school

But Perry Ehrlich's kids will be in step heading back

**Peter Birnie**



AISLE SEAT

It's a pretty safe bet that after so glorious a summer the kids will slouch back to school next week as if taking part in the Bataan death-march. You can spot the ones from the Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! musical theatre program because they'll be time-stepping down the road to perdition.

Last week I attended closing night of *TV Or Not TV*, the end-of-summer show that serves as a recital for the annual Gotta Sing! Gotta Dancel camp. There had already been a trio of performances at the conclusion of the July program and this was the capper for the August classes. I came away genuinely thrilled, not only impressed at the energy and talent on display but moved by the beauty that bursts forth

when children and teens gain genuine purpose in life. Even the artifice of musical theatre is home to far more skills than they'd ever gain from Nintendo or the shopping mall.

This evening was much more than just a forum for 83 kids to prove to their parents that their money had been well-spent. It had, in fact, with ample evidence that whatever the future holds for these youngsters they've grown from the experience. Some of the kids are clearly headed for professional careers (and many of these have already set out on the journey), while all the others who'll go on to be doctors and lawyers and such will do so with a better appreciation of teamwork, effort and the joy of learning tricky skills.

"Travelling" may be out in basketball but it makes for great movement on stage, and when a chorus of kids then tap-danced atop their briefcases to *Wall Street* from *Dames at Sea*, down came the house in another of many loud bursts of applause. Program director Perry Ehrlich has a weakness for old show tunes, stealing from them shamelessly to write a story that's ostensibly set at the taping of a TV game show (*Broadway Squares*, natch) but has much more to do with paying tribute to New York, NYC from *Annie*, *42nd Street* and of course *New*

*York, New York* were all part of the program, along with a coffee medley (including the delicious old gems *Let's Have Another Cup of Coffee* and *A Cup of Coffee, a Sandwich and You*), a spoof of both Marilyn Monroe and Madonna in *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend* and Ehrlich's liberal reinterpretation of *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* as *Take Me Out to the Opera*. I teased him about having to teach the kids what a nickelodeon was for the "put another nickel in" song, but to Ehrlich's credit he also gave his gang some Sister Sledge (*We Are Family*) and Abba (*Thank You For the Music*) to belt out.

He also hands them a golden group of instructors: Valerie Easton, David Connolly and Isabelle Maheux on choreography, Chris McGregor on improv and Susan Lehmann on drama, with company co-founder Wendy Stuart and David Fromager on music. And kudos to Rebekka Sorensen for coming up with enough sets and especially costumes to not only cover the show's many musical bases but do it all with a cheeky low-budget sense of style.

My neighbours and I are relieved a pair of seagull chicks that hatched on a rooftop below us have finally figured out how to fly. They still return to plead for food from now-dismissive parents, but at least their incessant squeaking is less frequent. When the Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! troupe closed its show with heartfelt comments about Sept. 11 and a real tear-in-the-eye rendition of *You'll Never Walk Alone* from *Carousel*, I couldn't help thinking just how lucky some baby birds are to come from a good nest.