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## Q&A: Jody Madaras

The creator, director and star of Artisan Center Theater's *All Hands on Deck* on his 1942 revue. Plus, a review of the show by Mark Lowry

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New plays and musicals are important in theater; we can never look forward if we're always dwelling on the past. And while some playwrights struggle to get their work produced once—or, even harder, a second or third time—a few folks have figured out the key to creating new work that catches on in that important grouping of theaters that we don't talk about as often, but is still a major artery in the American theater: Community theater.

Think of Stuart Ross and his *Forever Plaid* franchise or Dan Goggin with *Nunsense*. Those works are endlessly performed, not to mention their myriad sequels. Audiences are entertained and, for the rights-holders and creators: *Cha-ching!*

New York performer, director and writer **Jody Madaras** may have hit on something similarly promising with his new revue, *All Hands on Deck*, which is currently having its third production ever at **Artisan Center Theater** in Hurst. Artisan is probably North Texas' most well-attended live theater in terms of audience percentage, doing six shows a week (often with two casts), and selling all or most of their 150 seats even on Monday and Tuesday nights. (The dark days are Wednesdays and Sundays.)

The show uses four performers, an announcer and a Big Band-style orchestra to recreate a 1942 USO road show for American troops, with the device of selling war bonds. So, it does dwell on the past, but in an invigorating way. Judging from a recent Tuesday night performance, not only does Artisan have a hit on its hands, but so does Madaras.

The show premiered in 2010 in Perrysburg, Ohio, and had a second staging last year at the Surflight Theatre in New Jersey. It's conceived by Madaras and Quincy Marr, with musical arrangements and between-song material written by Madaras.

Artisan gets a special deal in that Madaras is also the director and choreographer, as well as one of the lead performers, making him Artisan's first Equity performer in its 10-year history. (To boot, he's also the set and props designer.) Since Artisan double casts, Madaras' three cast-mates alternate, but he's in every performance.

Madaras has performed in *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*, the international tour of *Crazy for You*, and the national tour of *The Drowsy Chaperone*, in which he understudied every male role including Man in Chair. His Danny Kaye-esque charm and show-putting-on skills make it easy to see show, with him as star, is infectious.

The cast I saw (Michael Pandolfo, Claire Stewart and Natalie Berry; the other cast has Brian Boyce, Amy Atkins and Kristina Bain) and entertaining, with strong tap dance work from Madaras and Pandolfo, and lovely vocals by Berry (Stewart had noticeable off-rhythm). Music director Richard Gwozdz keeps the nine-member orchestra rockin' (this is also the rare instance of live music at Artisan).

What makes the show different from similar revues is that it's not the same-ol', same-ol' song selection. Yes, there are obvious choices like George M. Cohan's "Yankee Doodle Dandy," Gershwin's "The Man I Love," "By the Light of the Silvery Moon" and the finale, "America Beautiful." Peppered in are rarer tunes such as "Rosie the Riveter" and a comic ditty spoofing Hitler, "Der Fuehrer's Face." There's also "Last," which is best known as Etta James' 1960 signature, but it was written in 1941 for the film *Orchestra Wives*.

Before the performance, I sat down with Madaras for a brief interview.



**Jody Madaras**

**TheaterJones: How did you get the idea for this show?**

**Jody Madaras:** Most of my career I did song-and-dance-man roles, and a lot of musicals were written in the '40s and '50s or are from that period. I love that music. Several years ago I did a Big Band revue, and halfway through that show I said "can't I write something better?"

**Why'd you pick the year 1942?**

It's a pivotal year in world history. I looked at the music and started researching. I said "how can this be different from every other 1942 show?" I didn't want another homogenized revue. Everybody knows Bob Hope, Jack Benny and Martha Raye, they were part of the Hollywood Caravan in 1942, doing war bond drives, raising money. The plot is war bonds and the radio show. So I started writing the show, from the beginning it was easy.

**How did you pick the songs?**

All in all, we settled on what we both agreed on. Some songs had to be in the score, like "Chattanooga Choo-Choo" and "I'm In the Love," and we had some rare songs we wanted in. "Der Fuehrer's Face" is a goofy number in the radio show, it's a spoof on Hitler. "Riveter" was a hit then but it's kind of a rare song now.

**How did you find Artisan Center Theater?**

They found me. It started in Ohio, and some folks from New York came and wanted to license the show. Then [Producer] DeeAnn [Lynch] found me. She called me, we talked and she mentioned they didn't have a director, and I offered to come down and do it.

**What did you think of the talent pool here at auditions?**

Everyone who came to through the door wanted to be in the show, they knew it was something special. A lot of very talented local folks with a lot of personality plus. Then we had some really rare finds, some specialty finds. A woman came in and had "belly dancer" on her resumé. Another woman was a harpist. We have a Maxwell House guest spot in the radio show, so we're using them. [There's also an Andrews Sisters spot. They alternate with belly dancer Jordan Marrett and harpist Hannah Cooper, each doing two shows a week.]

**What response are you getting?**

Great. This show is about the audience, the veterans, World War II and Korean War veterans and their spouses. We wanted them to feel like they were part of the show.

**Are you working on another show?**

I might do a sequel to this, a Christmas show.

**Good thinking.**