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Hornsby widens musical range

NORFOLK

One of Hampton Roads' biggest pop music stars, Bruce Hornsby, has written a Broadway-style musical and will premiere it next January at the Wells Theatre.

Called "SCKBSTD," the project will be co-produced by the Virginia Stage Company and a New York production company.

Hornsby has won three Grammy Awards, released 14 records and collaborated with Ricky Skaggs, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, Sting and The Grateful Dead.

"It's pretty amazing," said Chris Hanna, artistic director for Virginia Stage, a Norfolk-based, nonprofit, professional theater. "He brings a genuinely fresh voice to the stage. Granted, he brings a fresh voice to whatever he does."

The musical calls for 14 characters and seven musicians. Hornsby and his band, The Noisemakers, will not be part of the show, Hanna said.

The story is set in a small town, Hanna said.

"The focus is on a family, a doctor, his wife and their son, as the couple go through somewhat of a midlife re-examination of their relationship," Hanna said. "Things have changed since they had a kid.

"In my mind, the show is very much about learning to love in new ways."

One of the outside producers, Mike Rafael, said Wednesday that he approached Virginia Stage regarding the musical, then learned about the company's American Soil series, which features new plays with local relevance.

He and Hornsby thought the musical would fit well with that series, Rafael said, since the musician lives in Williamsburg and the story is based in this region. "It seemed like the right place to do it."

Rafael and his business partners, David Riemer and Sonja Hoel Perkins, had been looking for a theater outside pressure-filled Broadway to nurture and develop the show, he said.

Hornsby is on vacation this week and not available for interviews, publicist Brendan Gillen said.

In a November interview with ABC News Radio posted on his Web site, Hornsby briefly discussed the musical, which will include new music plus eight songs from his latest album, "Levitate."

"It's an original story based on something that was happening in my town in a 12-13-14-month period a couple of years ago," he said.

Two months ago, Hornsby was reticent to divulge details. "I have to keep it a little mystery. 'Cause we don't want to give it away."

Hornsby said that he liked, "on a creative level, where it's taking me."

He said the title is like a vanity license plate, which he pronounced by spelling it out.

Hanna, however, pronounced it "Sick Bastard."

In the show, the chorus will be the UPS, Fed Ex and postal deliverers. "They're the heartbeat of the town. I just love that. It's very quirky," Hanna said.

Rafael said he hopes to eventually deliver the show to the Great White Way in New York.

"Selfishly, I would love it if the play went on to Broadway and earned Bruce and his producers and the Stage Company tons of money," Hanna said. "We did very well off of 'Secret Gar-

den,' " a musical that premiered in 1989 with Virginia Stage before spending nearly two years on Broadway. The local company earned royalties from performances.

"That's not why we do it," Hanna said. "Most importantly, it's about reputation."

Tickets to the musical can be purchased now only as part of a subscription to the Virginia Stage Company's 2010- 11 season.

Single tickets will go on sale in late August, said Keith Stava, the company's managing director.

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