

Backstage

Civil War 'Reunion,'
Northern-Style

At Ford's, a One-Sided Answer to 'Gone With the Wind'

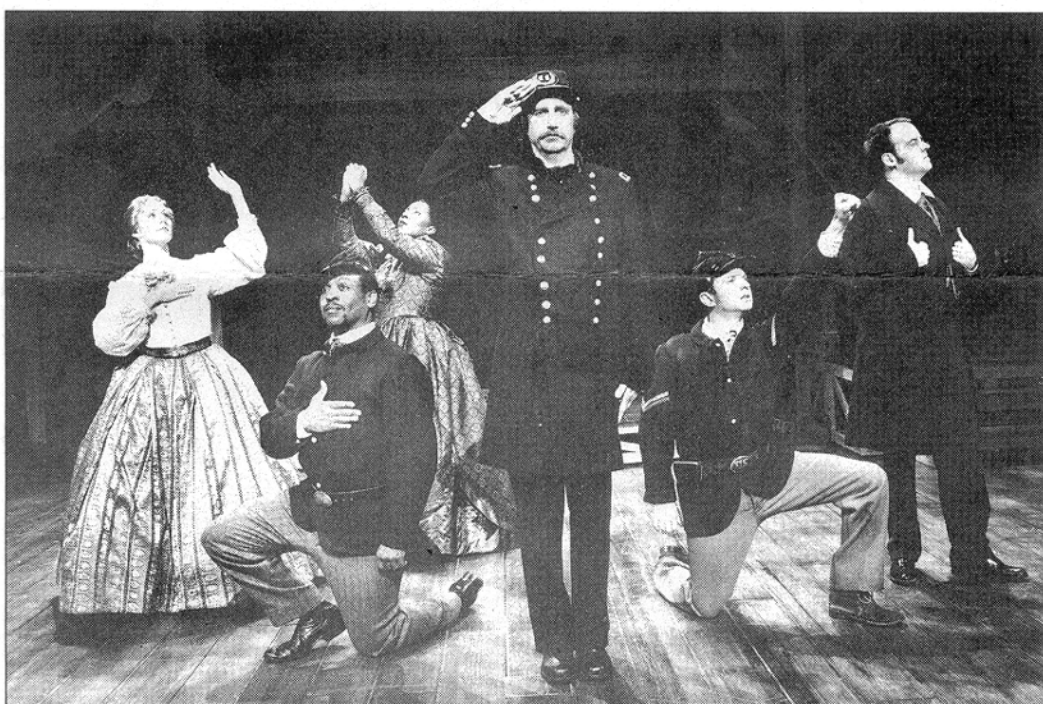
By JANE HORWITZ
Special to The Washington Post

When an audience member or two told Jack Kyrieleison that "Reunion," his "musical epic in miniature" about the Civil War from the Yankee point of view, seems one-sided, he made no apologies. "I told them I felt the same way about 'Gone With the Wind,'" he said with a serious smile.

"The issue is what was going on in the North with the Union," he explained last week, chatting in an office at Ford's Theatre, where "Reunion" officially opens tonight. Kyrieleison uses songs from the era and excerpts from speeches, letters, newspapers and memoirs to examine how the North struggled with the idea of fighting the war—with emphasis on the battle of wills between President Lincoln and the recalcitrant Gen. George McClellan. After listening to "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground," "Beautiful Dreamer," battlefield recollections, deathbed goodbyes and rejoicing over Emancipation, patrons with dry eyes may be rare at Ford's.

Washington will be the farthest south the show has played, and Ford's is easily the most historically resonant venue. "Reunion" takes place 25 years after Lincoln's assassination. It centers on a character named Harry Hawk—the actor who was onstage at Ford's in "Our American Cousin" when Lincoln was shot—joined here by five other vaudevillians, who perform an entertainment recalling the war. But Ford's won't be mentioned in the show; the actors are simply in "a theater" on the vaudeville circuit.

Kyrieleison, a Montgomery Blair and University of Maryland grad, has resettled in Kensington with his wife and son and their dog, Stonewall. His interest in the Civil



PHOTOS BY STAN BAROUH

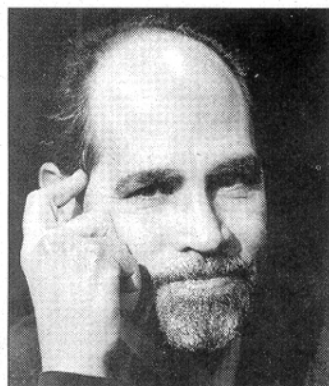
Ford's Theatre is the farthest south and without a doubt the most historical venue that "Reunion" has played.

War as fodder for a theater piece was sparked by Ken Burns's PBS documentary. After three years of research, the Washington-based actor was "drowning in material. . . . I was really stunned by what I found." He asked a friend, fellow actor Ron Holgate, to help him shape the material. Holgate, who's featured in the current Broadway revival of "Kiss Me, Kate," directed this production for Ford's. "I saw a potential there," said Holgate, who realized that Kyrieleison "needed to tell a story" with the results of all that research.

"Reunion" is in sharp contrast with the Broadway behemoth "The Civil War." "My feeling was, the smaller we made this, the less confusion on the part of the audience," said Kyrieleison. "[We're] not trying to show the 23,000 people who died at Antietam."



Harriett D. Foy and James Stovall in Kyrieleison's musical, "Reunion, a Musical Epic in Miniature."



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