

In stitches

Playwright captures life when 'Married Alive'

BY JACK HELBIG
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Sean Grennan is very much a married man.

Chicago-area theater fans might recognize Grennan — as well as his wife, Kathy Santen — as busy actors on the local entertainment scene in the 1990s.

These days, however, Grennan lives in New York (Santen is in the Broadway production of "Wicked") and is known as much for his writing as his acting.

Grennan's 2006 musical comedy "Married Alive" is currently running at the Noble Fool at St. Charles' Pheasant Run Resort. The play's origins go back about six years.

"I was working in 2003 at the (Kansas City-based) American Heartland Theater," Grennan says. "I was working there as an actor in a James Still play called 'The Diary of Adam and Eve.'"

One day, the director of Productions, Paul Hough,

mentioned that he was looking for new material. Hough knew Grennan was also a writer, although his best-received work, the 1995 musical comedy "The Phantom of the Country Palace," had premiered nearly a decade before.

"Paul told me that if I had a show he would give it a hard look," Grennan says. "That is like crack for writers."

At the time, Grennan was writing shows on the side. The last musical he'd written that went on to a full production was "Ms. Cinderella," produced in 1996 at Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire.

Grennan pumped Hough for more information on the kind of shows they were looking for.

"We chatted over drinks," Grennan says. "He told me, 'We are attracted to small cast shows. We tend to do comedies here.'"

So Grennan went back to New York and began to brainstorm.

"I thought about the things I know about," Grennan says. "And then I thought about a show about marriage."

Grennan contacted composer Leah Okimoto, with whom he had done other work. Grennan would write the story and the lyrics; Okimoto would write the music.

"We started brainstorming what a scene about these people might be," Grennan says. "At first I thought of doing a show that followed a marriage from the first blush to the more experienced years."

The show came together quickly.

"We called it 'From Niagara to Viagra,'" he says. "It was more of a revue at first. A series of sketches about marriage."

Grennan kept to his promise to use only four actors. But in the style of comedy revues, the four actors played many different characters. Eventually, Grennan and Okimoto decided to focus on only four people: two couples, one at the beginning of marriage and one



Parents Ron (Matthew R. Jones) and Diane (Anne Gunn, center) cope with their kids (Justin Berkobien and Megan Long) in Sean Grennan's "Married Alive," now at Noble Fool in St. Charles.

with more experience. "We wanted the audience to care about them," Grennan says.

The show had a reading in 2004 at Playwrights Horizon in New York City, and again, in another draft, in 2005 at Marriott in Lincolnshire. The show premiered at the American Heartland Theatre in Kansas City. It has

six musicals and one play.

"I really like this writing thing," Grennan says. "I like waking up in my own place, sitting at my own desk and writing."

• "Married Alive" runs through Oct. 31 at Pheasant Run Resort & Spa, 4051 E. Main St., St. Charles. For tickets, call (630) 584-6342 or visit noblefool.org.