



Photo provided

The Toronto-based Classical Theatre Project presents "Hair" on Thursday at Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage.

# 'HAIR' GETS BACK TO ITS ROOTS

Tour stopping at Mendel Center will feature a more expansive version of the musical

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**  
HP Features Writer

**BENTON HARBOR** — The invitation was unexpected.

Charles Roy, cofounder of the Toronto-based Classical Theatre Project, was considering adding "Hair," the American tribal love-rock musical, to its 2014 touring season when James Rado, who along with Gerome Ragni wrote the original book and lyrics for the controversial Broadway hit, asked if they could meet.



ROY

"Apparently he had been mulling over the piece for the last while because he had some slight revisions in mind for the book and songs and he wondered if I would be open to them," Roy says by telephone from Toronto. "I was like, 'Absolutely.'"

When Roy visited Rado in New

## IF YOU GO

► **WHAT:** Classical Theatre Project presents "Hair"

► **WHEN:** 7 p.m. Thursday

► **WHERE:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

► **HOW MUCH:** \$48-\$56

► **CONTACT:** 927-1221 or [www.lmcmainstage.org](http://www.lmcmainstage.org)

► **ARTIST INFO:** [www.classicaltheatreproject.ca](http://www.classicaltheatreproject.ca)

► **PARENTAL DISCRETION:** While the show is recommended for those age 13 and older, parental discretion is advised. There is a brief scene with nudity that is non-sexual in nature.

York, the playwright pulled out "this big yellow bag of clippings and notes and cocktail napkins — all these original things that became the concept for the show," Roy says.

"He guides me through all the principles of where the show came from and why. ... The idea of getting back to the show's origins became this amazing starting point."

After that meeting, Roy realized just how sanitized the perception of "Hair" had become in the nearly five decades since first landing on Broadway. The show's central message of people struggling against a system that doesn't seem to be listening to them had become buried under the stereotype of happy hippies running around singing fun rock songs.

"The reality was quite different," says Roy, who directs a cast of 16 appearing Thursday at Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage in a tour that began Jan. 24 and continues through May 11. "Hair" began from this desperate political place where young people in the culture were struggling against these significant forces. It

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## HAIR

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was born from that place of desperation and was meant as a point of ignition of the cultural discourse of the day – and it was.”

The story centers around a “tribe” of politically active friends living a bohemian life in New York City. Claude (Eric Kopacsi), Berger (Joshua Wiles), their roommate Sheila (Eden Richmond) and others struggle to find a balance between life, love and the sexual revolution and their rebellion against the Vietnam War, their conservative parents and society.

Ultimately, Claude must decide whether to resist the draft, or to succumb to the pressures of his parents to serve in Vietnam, compromising his principles and risking his life.

While the overall story remains the same, this production does include several of Rado’s updates. The story is a bit more expansive with subtle twists of plot and character, but the biggest change is the actual restoration of two



Photo provided

**The Classical Theatre Project will bring “Hair” to the Mendel Center on Thursday. The troupe’s performance will feature a more expansive story, including two songs that weren’t in the Broadway version of the musical.**

songs that were not included in the Broadway version of the show.

“The first is called ‘Dead End,’ which is sung by the

African-American members of the cast in Act I about the obstacles they have to deal with,” Roy says. “The second is a

ballad sung by Claude called ‘Xanaplanetooch,’ which was in the original Off Broadway production but didn’t make it to

Broadway in ’68. He sings about the world as he envisions it. I don’t think it’s been heard in any major revival in over 40 years.”

One of the other changes is that instead of employing out-of-sight musicians, the cast itself plays instruments live on stage.

“It gives it this rousing, visceral, high-energy feel, but it also gives it a sense of urgency that comes from a place of what the time was actually like,” Roy says. “It’s got this gritty, edgy feel.”

He also believes that such changes can only help the musical, which encapsulated such a specific generation, find relevance in the lives of a modern audience.

“It’s still Vietnam and it’s still LBJ,” Roy says. “But there are still ideas that can give it a certain modern relevance and edge that today’s audiences will respond to. The essential element of young people struggling against a system that has alienated them or seemed to have forgotten them hasn’t changed. We aren’t facing the same monster anymore but the fact that we’re still facing a monster hasn’t changed and the show speaks to that.”

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