

'La Cage aux Folles' stands the test of time

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Since *La Cage aux Folles* premiered on Broadway in 1983, 12 states and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage. [Summer Lyric Theatre](#) at Tulane University will open this year's season on June 20 with the perennial classic musical of love between two men. As B. Michael Howard, artistic director of the company, stages the popular show for the third time, he reflects on the societal changes that have taken place over the last 30 years.



The first time he directed *La Cage aux Folles* for Summer Lyric Theatre, B. Michael Howard played the role of drag queen Zaza. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

"This show is probably more timely than ever," says [Howard](#), who played the lead role of drag queen Zaza for Summer Lyric's first production of the musical in 1991, which he also directed. He directed Summer Lyric's second staging of the show in 1999, and he will direct this year's production as well.

"It's about two people loving each other and raising a child. There are so many touching moments. What I love most is, it's about allowing people to love and to be who they are," says Howard, the Albert and Linda Mintz Professor of Music and director of the musical theatre program at Tulane.

Howard can't help launching into "I Am What I Am," the first act's finale. "I am my

own special creationâ?| so what, if I love each feather and each spangle!”

When Summer Lyric Theatre surveyed its patrons last year, *La Cage aux Folles* was named the No. 1 show they would like to see again. Howard thinks audiences respond to the love story and the way the character Zaza resonates with people.

Playing the role of Zaza this year is veteran New Orleans actor Bob Edes Jr.

“Bob Edes' performance is what makes it fresh for me,” Howard says. “He is going to be one of the best Zazas ever. He has such a clear, strong voice. He's a chameleon â?| he can go anywhere [dramatically].”