



Musical raises bar – onto stage

Bhakthi Puvanenthiran

Melburnians probably aren't used to buying a drink on the set of a show, but putting a working bar on stage is all part of the intimate feel John Frost is hoping to achieve with his latest venture, *Once the Musical*.

Starring Britain's Tom Parsons and Australia's Madeleine Jones, the Oscar-winning show comes to Melbourne's Princess Theatre in September and will be the final version of the musical to be produced by the original creative team, John Tiffany and Martin Lowe.

Frost, who said his initial impression was that it "wasn't commercial enough", explained how actually seeing the show completely changed his mind. "I fell for this show – hook, line and sinker," he said on Friday.

However, Frost did admit both the

musical and cast were relatively unknown quantities to Melbourne audiences.

"We do have to educate the public about this musical and this cast, but what I'm excited about is that this is brand new, it's not a revival, it's not *Wicked* or *Les Miserables* or the *King and I* and I think the theatre-going public do have a hunger for new shows," he said.

"The amazing thing about this cast is that they are all quadruple threats – singing, acting, dancing and playing music all at the same time. John Tiffany was really impressed by the quality of Australian performers at the audition level."

The 2006 film starred Irish musician Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova, and won a variety of awards, including an Academy Award for the song *Falling Slowly*. Though the film is primarily set

on the streets, the Broadway and West End musical has primarily been set in an Irish pub, hence the working bar for punters to access during interval.

Parsons and Jones have seen the film but neither had seen the Broadway or West End takes.

"For us, it's the opportunity to create, rather than reproduce, and I think as an actor, that's a golden opportunity," said Parsons, who most recently was in Australia on an arena tour of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Jones, whose most recent credit was *M. Rock* for the Sydney Theatre Company, says she hopes audiences fall in love with the music of *Once*.

"I hope people who say, 'Oh no, I don't like musical theatre,' take a chance on this show, or get dragged along to it. Like John did, he got dragged along and now he loves it," she said.



Tom Parsons and Madeleine Jones in *Once*. Photo: Simon Schluter