

spotlight

Ron Jenkins

Would Ron Jenkins sell his soul to direct good theatre?

Maybe he already has, if the decade-long success of *The Black Rider* is any indication.

For the past 10 years he's been involved with *The Black Rider*, *The Casting Of The Magic Bullets*, adapted by Tom Waits, William Burroughs and director Robert Wilson from a traditional German story. In it, a young man bargains with the devil for seven magic bullets, hoping to win the woman he loves. Not everything goes as planned.

"I love this grand, universal story," says Jenkins from Edmonton, where he's doing double duty preparing the November Theatre production for the Tarragon and also helming kids' show *The Forbidden Phoenix*, which comes to Toronto later this season.

"The centuries-old tale speaks to a modern audience, because it's about the tiny things for which you sell your soul, what you do on a daily basis to get the things you love. It's a human dilemma we all face, one involving personal morality."

The project began in 1997, when University of Alberta student Michael Scholar Jr. discovered the piece — though written in English, it had premiered in German and toured Europe — and presented it at the Edmonton Fringe. A year



later Jenkins directed the remount, which went to the New York Fringe and won a number of awards for the production and Jenkins's contribution.

Jenkins, who formerly ran Edmonton's Workshop West and is well-known locally for his productions of *BASH'd*, *The Red Priest* and *Any Night*, sees the production as a German cabaret-style piece in the tradition of Brecht and Weill, with Waits's music combining blues and straight-out rock.

"What I love about directors like Wilson and Robert Lepage is that they use everything to tell a story: text, image, lights and music. That makes magic on-stage, and our chamber version of *The Black Rider* still excites audiences and the company, who love coming back to it."

He's discussed retiring the show after the Toronto run.

"But I'm still singing the music," he says. "Maybe it'll have more life yet."

See Opening, page 65.

JON KAPLAN