

Broadway bowls on despite stage- hand strike

BY YVONNE VILLARREAL

A Mama Mia dancer wiggled down the bowling lane. A Spring Awakening actor sang out with joy before a teammate tossed a ball down the polished floor. The writer of Altar Boyz took a swig of beer before clutching a neon green ball in his hand.

Broadway may be dark, but some Broadway actors have managed to bring an entertaining ad-lib show to another venue: the Port Authority Bus Terminal.

After theater curtains descend each Thursday, actors and staff of Broadway and Off-Broadway shows take over 30

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lanes and compete at the newly remodeled Leisure Time Bowling Alley in the Port Authority Bus Terminal while relaxing over beer and cocktails as part of the Broadway Show Bowling League.

The stagehands strike union has shut down Broadway for 10 days, but it hasn't stopped league members from scuffing the polished floor of the bowling alley—the league was only two teams short of its typical turn-out on Nov. 15.

"We were concerned that the strike would affect the bowling attendance, as well as being worried about everything else the strike affects, of course," said Amber Wedin, co-organizer of the League. "I think that people still want to see each other in the theater community, and bowling is always a good place to meet up. Also, it's a great outlet for uncertain times like these. The mood was great—everyone is there to have a great time, and it's a place where you can forget about work."

Founded in 1962, the league's roster has included Martin Short and Bernadette Peters when they were part of the cast of "The Goodbye Girl" and Rosie O'Donnell during the time she played Rizzo in "Grease."

Since the league was on hiatus last year because of bowling alley renovations, Amber Wedin and Steve McDonald, the organizers, had the challenge of publicizing the League's revival in an industry that doesn't leave much time for extracurricular activities. They faxed fliers to Broadway and Off-Broadway shows and notified online theater sites.

"We were just hoping to spread the word out and attract a good sized group," Wedin said.

They succeeded.

Among the shows participating this season are Spring Awakening, Avenue Q, Mary Poppins, Mamma Mia, Altar Boys, Rent and Jersey Boys. Trophies are awarded to the best team and the most improved team at the end of each 15-week season.

Those involved, though, said that



Photos courtesy of Broadway Show Bowling League

The Alley Waxers team poses for a photo on a recent Thursday night as part of the Broadway Show Bowling League

Kevin Del Aquila, writer of Altar Boyz. "It can get overwhelming memorizing lines, dance routines and remembering what prop goes where and how the sound levels are. When we bowl, we relax."

During the playing time, members can purchase tickets for the League's 50/50 lottery. Half of the money goes to the person with the winning number; the other half is donated to Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. The amount varies each week—around \$100 to \$150. A dollar from the \$16 bowling fee also goes to the charity (the bowling alley charges \$15 per person). The League raises about \$2,000 per season and has two seasons per year.

For some, the charity games can get ultra competitive. Del Aquila recalled a member of the Les Miserables team who punched a hole in a wall when he threw a gutter ball in the mid-'90s.

length sweat shorts. The Broadway dancer then clutched a ruby-colored bowling ball with both hands and dramatically raised it up toward her chin. Her team players swooned in unison as if they were in a chorus line. She swayed her right hand back and then released the ball.

Ker-plunk!

All but two pins were knocked down. Happy with the results, she did a pirouette before walking off the lane as if it was the end of a scene in Mamma Mia, where she is part of the ensemble cast.

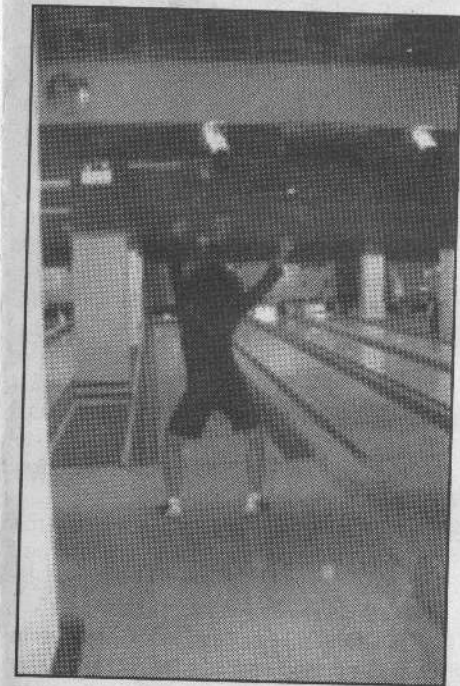
"Watch out. We're gonna unleash the beast," said Reed, who is a member of the second Mamma Mia team.

Bowling isn't the only recreational activity for these theater professionals. For more than 50 years, the League has played softball in Central Park. From April through the middle of August, games are played Thursdays before evening performances, with theater enthusiasts sitting in the stands.

"I'm not much of a softball player," said Tony-award-winning actor John Gallagher Jr., 23, from the cast of Spring Awakening. "This [bowling] is more my style. Where else can you drink some beer, wear ridiculous looking shoes, be as loud as you want and have fun?"

Shows inevitably close as each year passes, but teams continue their run or players join other existing teams. Some even find a job in the process.

"The League is a great way to network," said Terry LaVada, 52, an unemployed star dresser who worked on The Producers. "You mingle and hear about



Broadway bowler Courtney Reed hams it up after tossing a ball down the lane.

openings in your line of work. It's great."

Although some battled to keep their eyelids from closing as 2 a.m. neared, others lingered, trying to improve their game.

"I'm definitely not going to set my alarm," Gallagher said. "I'll just wake up when I feel like it. I'll probably be dreaming about bowling. Let's just hope I wake up in time for Friday night's performance."