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Playbill for Mud River Stone

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[[image of Kelly Bishop, L. Scott Caldwell and Suzanne Cryer in Proposals]]

[[image of Neil Simon]]

LOVE STORIES

Old flames are rekindled and new loves are born in Proposals, a romantic comedy by Neil Simon that finds the playwright far from his usual urban haunts

by Sheryl Flatow

Neil Simon, at age 70—yes, 70!—is still evolving as a playwright. Proposals, which opened last month at the Broadhurst Theatre, is Simon's 30th Broadway production and, in many ways, it is unlike any of the 29 that have gone before it. The Simon wit and humor are very much in evidence, but the outdoor set designed by John Lee Beatty immediately established a mellow and magical atmosphere foreign to the playwright's familiar urban landscapes. The play takes place near a resort in the Pocono Mountains, not-too-many miles but a world away from the New York abodes that are the backdrop for most of Simon's works. With the exception of the role of the father, portrayed by Dick Latessa, none of the characters is inherently or emotionally Jewish. A lead character is a black woman, played by remarkable L. Scott Caldwell, marking the first time in his career that Simon has written a substantial role for an African-American actor. That, in turn, compelled him to modify his familiar cadences and inflections, and develop a rhythm of speech which would be truer to this particular woman. "Her humor is different," says Simon. "Her take on life is different."

Above: Neil Simon (inset) and (fr. l.) Kelly Bishop, L. Scott Caldwell and Suzanne Cryer in Proposals

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