

It's lights out for Kathie Lee Gifford's 'Scandalous' Broadway show

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December 7, 2012

NEW YORK (RNS) In the end, even Kathie Lee Gifford couldn't save the Broadway musical about a woman who saved souls.

"Scandalous: The Life and Times of Aimee Semple McPherson" will close Sunday (Dec. 9), a little more than three weeks after its opening. Gifford wrote the book and lyrics for the show based on the life of the pioneering female evangelist whose career was shaken by scandal in the 1920s.

The show was Gifford's first such Broadway endeavor and the first Broadway musical about the evangelist's life.

"There's a sadness that comes with this," Gifford said Wednesday (Dec. 5) on the fourth hour of NBC's "Today" show, where she is the co-host. "It's taken awhile to find our audience because nobody knows what our show was. What's happening now, and this is kind of the sad part, people are coming back second, third, fourth and even fifth times because they love it so much."

While critics praised Carolee Carmello, a Tony Award nominee who plays McPherson, the musical failed to generate positive reviews. The New York Times called it "generic and dull." The New York Daily News said the show "could have used Sister Aimee's curative abilities."

Gifford worked on the musical for 12 years. It grew out of her fascination with McPherson, who is known as perhaps the first modern evangelist and is also known for charges she faked her own kidnapping.

McPherson's Los Angeles megachurch eventually became the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, which now claims almost 8 million members worldwide.

On "Today," Gifford said Hurricane Sandy had hurt Broadway attendance and she encouraged viewers to go to theaters. She also thanked those who saw "Scandalous" and praised the cast.

"I'm prejudiced, of course. I'm the mother of this show, but they're the best cast on Broadway," she said. "I love them to pieces."