

All-singing sideshow

Now we have a true-blue musical, writes SIMON PLANT

THEY arrived as scripts, scores and recordings; some in elaborate boxes, others stapled together.

Now, after months of sorting through 144 entries, the judges of the inaugural Pratt Prize for Music Theatre have reached their decision.

The \$50,000 cash prize goes to *Sideshow Alley* by Gary Young (lyrics) and Paul Keelan (music).

Young and Keelan's musical, set in a boxing troupe among "freaks, fighters and misfits", also gets a Production Company workshop performance valued at \$30,000.

"Writing a musical is a long and difficult process," an elated Keelan says. "With this prize we can take it off paper and move it to the stage."

The Pratt Prize, an initiative of the Pratt Foundation, seeks to stimulate the creation of Australian music theatre with wide appeal.



Musical cheers: Gary Young (left) and Paul Keelan celebrate their big win at Raheen. Picture: IAN CURRIE

Announcing the winners at Raheen yesterday, Jeanne Pratt said: "No one expects to produce a hit straight off. The musicals coming through are works in progress, like

the prize. But clearly there are a lot of people wanting to write and the standard is high."

The judging panel, which included producer Ken Mackenzie-

Forbes and composer Jonathon Mills, assessed musicals, music drama, opera and operetta.

Recordings or scores, with detailed script/books or a libretto, were

submitted and entries were confined to works that had not been performed professionally.

Jeanne Pratt said: "We expected to get perhaps a dozen or two dozen entries. Clearly this award has been a powerful creative catalyst."

Young and Keelan are a formidable team. Their first major musical, *Ship of Fools*, was performed at Chapel off Chapel by a cast including Marina Prior and John O'May, while *Tea With Oscar*, a Wilde blend of music and song, earned a Green Room nomination.

Sideshow Alley, set in 1950s Australia, is "a story of prejudice, lost love and tragic consequences".

"It was a time when there was great prejudice against people being different," Keelan says. "That theme still resonates."

Young, associate director of the touring production *Mamma Mia!*, believes Australians are hungry for homegrown musicals.

"There's a real need to embrace stories that feel familiar. The raw material is there, no question."

Making a song and dance: In tomorrow's Weekend magazine.