

Mail Tribune

NEWS NOW

Camelot's 'Producers' delights

"The Producers," which opened Friday night at Camelot Theatre in Talent, is patently offensive, breathtakingly tasteless and the funniest thing you'll see this year. Artistic Director Livia Genise has a way with Broadway musicals, and this one may be the biggest, boldest, most bodacious ever mounted (there's even a smirky joke at that theatrical verb) at Camelot.



Q Zoom

By Bill Varble
Posted Mar. 23, 2014 @ 2:00 am
Updated Mar 24, 2014 at 11:59 AM

"The Producers," which opened Friday night at Camelot Theatre in Talent, is patently offensive, breathtakingly tasteless and the funniest thing you'll see this year. Artistic Director Livia Genise has a way with Broadway musicals, and this one may be the biggest, boldest, most bodacious

ever mounted (there's even a smirky joke at that theatrical verb) at Camelot.

Picture two old-fashioned comics. The first is deadpan. The second can barely get the joke out for cracking up. But if the material is good enough, the audience is swept along. "The Producers" is an extended riff of the second kind, an absurd, comic juggernaut giddy with its power to keep topping itself.

There's a lot to top. From the cooing chorus girl/pigeons atop the Greenwich Village digs of deranged Nazi playwright Franz Liebkind to Swedish bombshell Ulla Inga Hansen Benson Yansen Tallen Hallen Svaden Swanson auditioning for the job of "secretary-slash-receptionist" to the towering Don Matthews camping it up as Roger De Bris ("the worst director on Broadway") playing a flamboyantly gay Führer in the big production number "Springtime for Hitler."

That preposterous musical — where could it come from but the fevered imagination of Mel Brooks? — is the device on which everything turns. You've probably seen either the 1968 movie with Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder or the 2005 redo with Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick, but let's recap.

Max Bialystock (David King-Gabriel), once the king of Broadway, has just had another flop with "Funny Boy," a musical version of Hamlet. Fallen on hard times, he's become a play-for-pay seducer of the well-heeled little old ladies he keeps conning into writing investment checks made out to his next play, a thing called "Cash."

Enter timid accountant Leo Bloom (Peter Wickliffe), who carries a little blue security blanket to ward off panic attacks and has Mitty-esque visions of glory. Persuaded by Max to cook the books of his last flop, for which Max had raised \$2,000 more than the production cost, Leo has a killer of an idea: "Under the right circumstances, a producer could actually make more money with a flop than he can with a hit."

Advertising on MailTribune.com generates interest from new and existing customers

“ The online ad that has been running since the latter part of August has generated interest and compliments from established customers, and has introduced the store to new customers. For that reason I have extended the campaign for a full year. **”**

— **Joni Roskofsky, OWNER**
Morrissey's Clothes Cottage
www.MorrisseysOfMedford.com

SOUTHERN OREGON MEDIA GROUP
Mail Tribune • Daily Tidings • Nickel

Click here to find out how the things we know can help your business grow

COUPON OF THE WEEK

Save 50% or more on **LimelightDeals.com**
Visit limelightdeals.com/deal/southern-oregon to view deals that will...
LimelightDeals.com

SEE ALL ONLINE TODAY [MORE >>](#)

- Save \$50 on our Nano Peel Renew Medical Spa at Medical Eye Center
- Buy 2 Obagi Radiant Blue Peels, get 1 free! (Save \$125) Renew Medical Spa at Medical Eye Center
- \$10 Off Any Service TC Chevy
- Free Dessert Cicily's Pastaria & Grill
- Happy Hour Appetizer Prices Anytime With

Dollar signs light up in Max's eyes. Leo, after a fantasy sequence dramatizing his soul-sucking office job, realizes his true calling ("I Wanna Be a Producer"), the stars align, and a plot is hatched.

The boys will find the worst play ever written, hire the worst director in town, find the worst actors on Broadway, raise \$2 million ("One for me, one for you," Max tells Leo) by overselling shares, then de-camp to Rio when the turkey closes after opening night.

Hey. What could possibly go wrong?

The show, with an esthetic best described as Busby Berkeley meets Leni Riefenstahl meets RuPaul, is an improbable hit. Mistaken as satire by the audience, it is hailed by critics, creating a major problem for the boys ("Where Did We Go Right?").

By this point the show has managed to offend gays, Jews, women, audiences, Germans, Swedes, critics, prosperous widows of a certain age, Bavarian peasants and — you get the idea. It has also aroused an audience already craving raw meat with those great (if not quite memorable) tunes by Brooks (yup), its frenzied choreography (who can forget the widows and their dancing walkers?) and beyond-spectacular costumes.

But the silly, let's-put-on-a-show plot — call it high-concept, low art — is really just the armature on which Brooks, a nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn, hangs a manic mix of gags, send-ups and mashugana madness knocking around in his head from growing up and working in the golden days of the Broadway musical.

King-Gabriel's Max is a canny mix of the shameless huckster and the strutting glamor that was Broadway in the days of Merrick. Wickliffe's Bloom (a Joycean name that, like others in the play, is a joke) is a repressed little nerd who allows himself to dream of wearing a "Broadway producer's hat" and winds up singing and hoofing with the elan of an old pro.

And Brooks' glee as an equal-opportunity offender — remember, he wrote the original film in the pre-political-correctness 1960s — is so irresistible that any offense given quickly drowns in a sea of laughs. The tone of the play, in fact, lacks a certain darkness that marked the 1968 movie.

There have been some changes. Flower-power icon Lorenzo St. Dubois (LSD), who played Hitler in the original film, has disappeared (the setting is pre-hippy 1959). The role of Ulla has been fleshed out (ahem), and Hammond's Ulla is dead-on as a platinum amalgam of Norse sex-goddesses from Garbo to Eckberg.

Liebkind (whose name means lovechild) has become more comical. In fact, dour-faced Nathan Monks as a beefy, petulant Nazi in lederhosen almost steals the show with his snappy rendition of "Hitler's favorite song," a fetching number called "Der Gutten Tag Hop-Clop" and his outrage at discovering der Führer has been disrespected.

It must have been no little challenge for Camelot's designers and costumers to match the antic spirit of the script, but they have triumphed, delivering a gay/Nazi/kitschy mise-en-scene, the apotheosis of which is the costumed DeBris in a headdress-topped outfit that makes him feel like the Chrysler Building.

The Broadway production called for a huge orchestra, but the score is ably delivered here by just five off-stage musicians, who sound like more. Video projections add visual flash and tongue-in-cheek comment.

If "The Producers" has a flaw, it's that the second act goes on a bit long after the climactic scene in which DeBris is forced to jump into the role of Hitler when Liebkind breaks a leg (not in the opening-night sense but literally). Matthews' flouncing about the stage as a diva dictator emotionally overcome by the love of his fans is a point of antic madness beyond which the show can no longer rise.

Max's trial, Leo and Ulla's flight to Rio, the prison schtick and the "Goodbye" number are thus somewhat anticlimactic. But the whole thing is a crazed love letter, and sometimes, even in love,

Care Giver-Group Home All shifts
MEDFORD, or Classifieds

Taj Indian Restaurant, LLC in
ASHLAND, or Classifieds

Rogue Valley CPA firm seeks well
Classifieds

AUTOMOTIVE TECHNICIANS AIRPORT
MEDFORD, or Classifieds

[More Top Jobs](#)

» TOP HOMES

- Central Point, Oregon - 559,900 - Hard to find, close in, 3.10 acres located at the end of quiet road. Central Point address but Medford school district. Pastures, great small...
- Medford, Oregon - \$359,900 - New home under construction in desirable East Medford's Vista Pointe. The home features nine foot ceilings throughout and eleven foot in the...

[More Top Homes](#)

» STAY INFORMED



Email
NewsLetter

Sign Up Today

Sign up for our newsletter and have the top headlines from your community delivered right to your inbox.

NEWSmax

- Americans Detained in North Korea Call for US Help
- Southern California High School Retires Divisive Arab Mascot
- Report: Doctors Bringing Joan Rivers Out of Medical Coma
- Only 27 Percent of ALS Ice Bucket Donations Used For Research
- Should Obama Order Strikes on ISIS in Syria? Vote Here
- How Seniors Are Increasing Testosterone
- Popular Weight Loss Pill Stumps Doctors
- Mortgage: 'Lazy' Borrowers Pay More

[What's This?](#)

the crazy just overwhelms.

Bill Varble writes about arts and entertainment for the Mail Tribune. He can be reached at varble.bill@gmail.com.

[» Comment or view comments](#)

More Articles and Offers



Side Effects: Weight Gain, Rashes, Diarrhea & More...



Refinance your home for as little as 2.6% (2.8% APR) with no hidden fees



Ashland arrest records. Who do you know? [Results could be



Click to learn about the new KeyBank Hassle-Free Account and get your \$150

ADVERTISEMENT

» READER REACTION

» TOP CLICKS

POPULAR EMAILED

Neighbors say man shot by police was veteran suffering from PTSD [Aug. 25, 2014](#)

Central Point man arrested after road rage leads to threats, gunfire [Aug. 26, 2014](#)

UPDATED: Northbound I-5 reopens after FedEx truck burns [Aug. 28, 2014](#)

Hydrocodone will be harder to get under new rules [Aug. 25, 2014](#)

UPDATED: Arrests made in shooting of Klamath County deputy [Aug. 28, 2014](#)

Naked, combative Grants Pass man arrested at Hemp Expo [Aug. 25, 2014](#)

» CALENDAR



Connect with MailTribune.com

Facebook

Twitter

RSS

Back to top

Reader Services

[Reader Services](#)
[Home](#)
[Subscriptions](#)
[Subscriber controls](#)
[Contact us](#)

Submissions

[Photos](#)
[Events](#)
[Letters to the editor](#)
[Corrections](#)
[Announcements](#)
[Obituaries](#)
[Story ideas](#)
[Since you asked](#)

Alerts

[Email Alerts](#)
[RSS Feeds](#)
[Text Alerts](#)

Advertise

[Media Kit Home](#)
[Products and services](#)
[Ad rates](#)
[Advertising contacts](#)

Stay Informed



[Email newsletter](#)

[Sign Up Today](#)

Sign up for our newsletter and have the top headlines from your community delivered right to your inbox.

Your privacy is important, read our [privacy policy](#).

[Mail Tribune](#) | [Daily Tidings](#) | [The Nickel](#) | [Shop Our Valley](#) | [Blogs](#) |

© Copyright 2014 Local Media Group, Inc. All Rights Reserved. [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Local Media Group Publications](#)
Original content available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons license, except where noted.
[MailTribune.com](#) | P.O. Box 1108, Medford, OR 97501