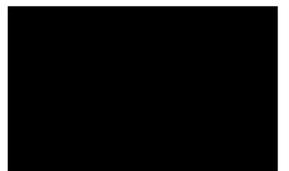




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"42nd Street" – Big Broadway Feel at Camelot Theatre Company

BY ROSEY – DECEMBER 2, 2012
POSTED IN: ROSEY'S PLAY REVIEWS



If reviewing this production were an exercise in free-association, the first word to come to mind would be "lavish."

And that's pretty interesting, since "lavish" is a word that you'd typically ascribe to extravagant set pieces. Yet, what impressed most on a mostly-unadorned stage was a grand and sustained profusion of fine performances, an abundance of musical energy, a torrent of stage-swelling tap dancing and a sea of sparkling smiles. (Okay. Perhaps one exception: the costumes designed by Barbara Rains *were* lavish!)

The show itself, based on a 1933 film adaptation of a novel, was a Tony Award winner when it opened on Broadway in 1980. And, as you might expect from a feel-good Depression-era script, the focus is on fun; a happy ending is never in question. And a number of tunes that have become standards, like "42nd Street" and "Lullaby of Broadway" will have you humming your way home. (A day later, I still can't get "Lullabye..." out of my head.)

The story follows the birth of a Broadway musical ("Pretty Lady") and the ascendance of a new chorus girl to stardom. A few fairly substantial obstacles stand in the way of small-town girl Peggy Sawyer (Sarah Gore), but with her talent and spunk, and an unflinching innocence, the success of this raw recruit is inevitable.

Like the character she portrays, Gore is an astounding and gifted performer, who leaves no doubts with her singing and dancing that director Livia Genise's casting was pitch perfect. As her complement in the role of the male lead Billy Lawlor, Galen Schloming is effervescent and well-matched. This guy's got some kind of smile. Their remarkably challenging, classically-inspired pas de deux toward the end of the show appeared effortless.

If there's a villain in this piece, it would have to be the hard-edged aging star, Dorothy Brock, a prima donna whose best days are in the rear-view. She's cast as the leading lady only because her ancient, money bags boyfriend is the angel backing the show. Linda Otto brings to the role a broad and unselfconscious comic sense. Instructed during rehearsals to hide behind the real hoofers, lest anyone notice her two left feet, she adds a dimension of hilarity.

Tyler Ward is a solid and consistent presence, succeeding as the dictatorial director Julian Marsh who struggles to pull the show together from casting and out-of-town trials through opening night on Broadway.

As good as the lead players are, success of this show understandably lives or dies by the quality of the chorus. And this ensemble, martialled by Genise and shaped by choreographer Rebecca Campbell (both off-stage and in her animated on-stage role of Maggie Jones), is dependably in-step, well-rehearsed and bursting with a delight that's contagious.

My only complaint is a continuing one, and resurfaces here only because of my appreciation for the musicians who, with no orchestra pit built into the theatre, must labor off-stage. Kudos to Peter Spring, Karl Iverson, Kathy Campbell, Steve Sutfin, Jesus Mendoza, Kendra Taylor and Lori Calhoun for producing an elegant and lockstep accompaniment with a sound well-calibrated to the auditorium.

Please do see "42nd Street" before it closes at the end of the year. It is hard to imagine any musical production that's as perfectly paired to this lovely venue.

(For this review, I credit my play going partner Clista Prella-Tworek for her insights and artist's perspective. Please see one example of her work below and find more on her website: <http://www.clistaspastels.com/>.

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