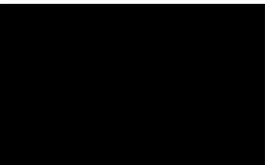


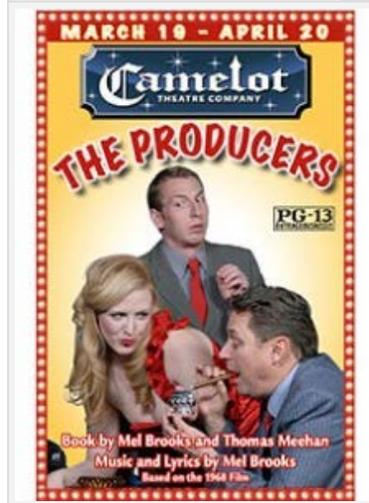
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"The Producers" – A Popping Production to Die For at Camelot Theatre Company

BY ROSEY – MARCH 28, 2014
POSTED IN: UNCATEGORIZED



Please take it from me, a terminal cancer patient most likely filing his last review, this brilliant production is to die for.

In one sense, my timing couldn't be much better. For "Driving Miss Daisy," the last play I saw at Camelot, I awarded my highest "Five Rosey" Rating.

So I'm afraid that since I'm awarding the same highest rating for "The Producers," a show that really can't be compared to "Daisy," I'm putting my credibility at high risk. But now, with nothing to lose....

Enough about me.

This production, directed by Livia Genise, starring David King-Gabrie, Kelly Hammond and Peter Wickliffe, is inspired and inspiring in all dimensions. Like all such triumphs, there are a lot of hands responsible, but I want to focus on one fellow, in particular, who you won't see on stage, or even back stage. The idea to put this play up came from my friend Joe Collonge, who, as the sponsor, put his money where his heart is. (It's an

old habit, I've learned.)

From opening curtain to the call, this show pops. The taut, tight and terrific book by Mel Brooks and Thomas Meehan which turned this into one of the funniest movies in 1968 (and the basis for a follow-up Broadway musical), provides a sturdy scaffolding on which the cast and company can trust to hang from in ultimate safety.

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Party People
All the Way

There's a fearlessness necessary when going to "war" with comedic material; there's always a risk of taking bits and shtick too far; and there's even greater risk of playing it safe.

On this stage, no one plays it safe. King-Gabriel and, in particular, Peter Wickliffe catapult themselves off every metaphorical limb. They don't merely push the envelope. They blow it to smithereens.

The most-perfect plot has Broadway producer Max Bialystock (King-Gabriel) and his mousy accountant partner Leo Bloom (Wickliffe) attempting to pull off a fool-proof scam. By producing a play that is sure not to survive past opening night, they can raise far in excess of the production costs without a need to return a penny to the multitude of investors. As long as the show flops, they get rich.

And, by choosing "Springtime for Hitler," a musical ode to the fuhrer, written by a neo-Nazi Franz Liebkind (played to the hairiest hilt by Nathan Monks) their success seems certain.

No matter all the other moving parts, this play doesn't work if Gabriel-King is anything less than a consummate performer and an actor able to embody a role that was happily overrun by the talented Zero Mostel.

Gabriel-King, about whom I've been critical for his past sins at not quite capturing the sense of the New York Jew in previous productions, has more than met this most daunting challenge. In this production, he not only reminds audiences why his singing and performance skills are second to none in Southern Oregon, he absolutely embodies Bialystok, eschewing, it seems, any and all temptations to stick with superficialities. He goes deep. Even as his character is going off the deep end.

And Wickliffe, who I've seen grow so demonstrably as an actor and performer over the past several years, leaves nothing on stage. Not only is he a powder keg of comic shtick, particularly when playing nice with Bialystok, but he manages to contain the raw hyper-hysterical energy with the maturity of a polished veteran.

Special kudos to my friend Glenn Hill who, in making his stage debut, apparently wasn't satisfied with just a single role; in fact, I happily took on the "Where's Waldo"-like challenge to pick him out in 10 different costumes, including that of an imposing panzer tank! He also does evince one heck of a walk-on Churchill.

And don't ask me about the dancing Hitlers!

As I wrote, To Die For.

Please see this show while it runs through April 20. See it for me.

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