



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 06, 2019

MICHAEL GILTZ AT WORK

THEATER: Reviewing The Revue Of Maury Yeston

ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IN THE THEATER: THE MUSICAL WORLD

OF MAURY YESTON ** 1/2 out of ****

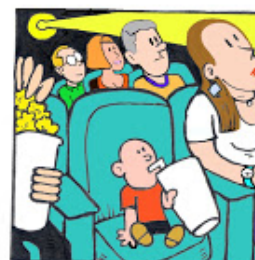
YORK THEATRE COMPANY

It's no secret that Gerard Alessandrini's *Forbidden Broadway* shows are mercilessly funny valentine's to the musicals they spoof. His genuine love for the theater takes the sting out of some pretty waspish observations. Well, here Alessandrini plays it straight. In what may be his first musical revue, he's crafted a classically conceived tribute to the work of lyricist/composer Maury Yeston.

Yeston needs no boost. He's got multiple Tonys, two huge Broadway hits in *Grand Hotel* and *Nine* and a masterpiece with *Titanic*. (That one's going to be a big hit whenever it's properly revived.) But boost him Alessandrini does. Sure, *Nine* dominates, with five of the 25+ shows on hand. In contrast, *Grand Hotel* has three, his off Broadway hit *Death Takes A Holiday* just one and *Titanic* doesn't appear until the finale, since its numbers perhaps don't make as much sense out of context.

That leaves more than half the show celebrating songs new to most, a far cry from most revues for artists of Yeston's stature. His work is lovingly showcased in a pitch perfect setting. The design by James Morgan is simple and clean, the choreography by Gerry McIntyre modest as it should be, the lighting by Jacob Zedek supportive without calling attention to itself, the costumes by Melinda Hare no-fuss until they add some *Forbidden*-like humor and pianist/musical director Greg Jarrett is the hardest working person in the room.

Alessandrini oversees it all with impeccable taste. The show is a tight 75 minutes, the song choices intelligently balanced, the transitions between numbers thoughtfully done and ensemble moments balanced



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out by duets and solo turns.



The problem, I fear, is the cast. They let down a revue that deserves better. With stronger performers, this revue would be a home run. As it is, they shine best when working in groups and of course the songs of Yeston lift them up time and again. Of course, revues should work the other way around.

Happily, while everyone falters at some point, they also have high points. Benjamin Eakeley plays the leading man capably, Alex Getlin's soft-rock vibrato is a treat the first time around, Jovan E'Sean does his best when introducing "Mississippi Moon" and both Justin Keyes and Mamie Parris make the most of any humor on tap. (Keyes' vocals simply aren't up to the demands of "Sant n' Pepper" while Parris has more to offer with her pipes throughout the night.)

Any time the cast works together the results are stronger, whether it's the tribute-to-actors ensemble opener "Anything Can Happen In The Theater," the sweet duet "You're There Too" (E'Sean and Keyes) or the far more comic "No Women In The Bible," featuring Getlin and Parris.

Like any revue worth the name, this one makes you want to revisit (or visit) Yeston's shows. Only the written to order title song feels a little by the numbers. The rest intrigue, like his own spin on *The Phantom Of The Opera* and the four songs from *In The Beginning*, a Biblical romp Alessandrini once directed in Maine, apparently. (That's a line worthy of *Forbidden*!) And the finale of "Godspeed, Titanic" never fails to raise goosebumps for me, whether during its original run on Broadway, at my niece's high school production a few years ago (full orchestra!) or by the cast here for their curtain call. That stirring drama will certainly have new life someday soon. Given the quality of the songs and the sturdiness of its construction, I'm sure this revue will too.

And fans of Alessandrini should keep an eye out for *Forbidden Broadway: The Next Generation*, which re-opens at the York starting January 15. *It's one of his best.*

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Anything Can Happen In The Theater: The Musical World of Maury Yeston ** 1/2

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