



TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 2018

MICHAEL GILTZ AT WORK

THEATER: "BROADWAY BY THE YEAR(S)" TACKLES 1947 AND 1966

BROADWAY BY THE YEAR: 1947 AND 1966
THE TOWN HALL

The 18th season of *Broadway By The Year* shows this celebration of musical theater in fine fettle. Creator and [impresario Scott Siegel](#) has tweaked the format yet again. This season each show is celebrating two years from Broadway history. On March 26, Act One included songs from 1947 while Act Two focused on 1966.

Yet some things never change: [the Monday night event](#) features stars from Broadway and cabaret, young talent appearing in smaller shows and fresh-off-the-bus kids in the ensemble. You always see a favorite actor, hear a tune or two you never knew before and discover artists whose names you want to write down so you can catch whatever they do next. Happily, this strong outing delivered precisely that.

After the usual niceties (including Siegel's smattering of trivia about the year in question -- and who knew the Russians reached the moon first, albeit an unmanned mission!), he revealed Act One would focus primarily on that year's two big hits: *Finian's Rainbow* and *Brigadoon*. This suggested an almost Encores-like approach to the evening, but *Broadway By The Year* isn't quite doing that. Still, five songs from *Finian* and four from *Brigadoon* gave a healthy taste of those successes. Interspersed in the middle was the comic gem "The Gentleman Is A Dope" from a rare Rodgers and Hammerstein flop, *Allegro*. Act Two was more diverse, with ten songs from six different shows.

My quick take-away? I'd love to see a production of *I Do! I Do!* and I want to see more of Jenny Lee Stern and Tony Yazbeck in anything.



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Siegel is always and admirably touting young talent. Tonight's ingénue was [Mia Gerachis](#), who was given a generous three solos: "How Are Things In Glocca Morra?", "Where Am I Going?" and the question mark-free song "There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This." Gerachis has a fine voice, good enough to make clear why she's snagged attention. Yet she's *performing* every song and we're too aware of the choices she is making. The sound of her voice had precedent over the meaning of the words. It will take time and seasoning to see if Siegel's faith can be rewarded.

Loyalty to newcomers and fan favorites alike is a mainstay of *BBTY*, an essential element since you're cajoling stars of cabaret and Broadway to do yet another show on their night off essentially for the love of it. Hence the return of the popular Sal Viviano, who had two ballads but scored best in an acoustic duet on "There But For You Go I" with Eddie Korbich that the crowd went crazy for.

Korbich is a second banana type, the sort of talented pro who would have worked nonstop back in 1947. He goofed on "When I'm Not Near The Girl I Love," tossed off multiple accents and had the crowd singing along to "Go Home With Bonnie Jean," enjoyed some of the loudest applause of the night with that "look ma, no microphone!" duet with Viviano and ended with a solid "Father Of The Bride." Think Norbert Leo Butz.

In contrast, the broad and funny [Lesli Margherita](#) was too eager to please this night, underlining the jokes in "The Gentleman Is A Dope" and absolutely steam-rolling over them in the show-stopper "Gorgeous" from *The Apple Tree*. She began at over-the-top and then went higher and higher but the result was we never got to enjoy the fun. Margherita had left us far behind. [She was good fun in Dames At Sea on Broadway](#) and won an Olivier Award in the UK so I know she can and will do better.

[Broadway star Betsy Wolfe](#) however was fairly new to me. I wouldn't judge anyone on the anonymous girlfriend role she tackled in *Bullets Over Broadway*. And I missed her during Wolfe's run in *Waitress*. So this was my first chance to see her up close and it was a treat. Her lovely rendition of "Look To The Rainbow" was so gentle the pleased audience almost forgot to applaud. And she soared with the comic tune "You've Got Possibilities" from *It's A Bird!...It's A Plane!...It's Superman!* Wolfe made our host Siegel the object of her makeover intentions and it worked a charm.

I had no doubts about Tony Yazbeck, having seen him repeatedly to great effect on Broadway, especially a revival of *On The Town*. In Act One he had two big numbers. Yazbeck swung "Old Devil Moon" nicely and then brought down the curtain with a performance of "Almost Like Being In Love" that combined singing and tapping with pizzazz -- his ability to tap and tap and tap and then go right into a big vocal moment without a pause for breath was especially impressive. If there

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THEATER: "BROADWAY BY
THE YEAR(S)" TACKLES
1947 AN...

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AWARD WINNERS FOR
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Margaritaville"

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► [2006](#) (2412)

► [2005](#) (5)

was any problem with Act Two, it was the fact that Yazbeck only came back for the group finale "It's Today."

But [Jenny Lee Stern](#) satisfied when she opened the show, had the eleven o'clock number and made the entire evening worth it just for her performances alone. Resplendently pregnant, Stern introduced her child-to-be to the world of theater by making the kid a humorous partner in a performance of "Necessity." Stern's headpiece alone held your attention, but her terrific voice kept the humor rooted in her character's predicament. She one-upped that by nailing the dramatic high point of *Mame* where the title character sings "If He Walked Into My Life," giving Eydie Gormé's classic rendition a run for its money in the process.

Yet that was nothing compared to her thrilling performance of the title song from *Cabaret*. Sure, it's a masterpiece, but it's also been done brilliantly by numerous stars (not least Liza) and also been done to death. Overly familiar songs like this can be a double-edged sword. Not for Stern. She immediately claimed our attention with a peerless vocal, paced it beautifully, kept the character and story behind it in mind so the song made sense dramatically (even if we hadn't been watching a production of *Cabaret* leading up to this moment) and set off fireworks by the end. The only way Stern could have topped it would have been by giving birth on stage for an encore. That didn't happen but I wouldn't put it past her.

Happily, Siegel keeps giving birth to more shows at [The Town Hall](#), [Feinstein's at 54 Below](#) (including a [Sinatra tribute on April 5th](#)) and other New York City venues, including another Broadway By The Year on May 21 and the season finale on June 18 both at The Town Hall.

THEATER OF 2018

Homelife/The Zoo Story (at Signature) *** out of ****

[Escape To Margaritaville](#) **

Broadway By The Year: 1947 and 1966 ***

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Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that they are in New York City unless otherwise indicated.

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