

Reviewing & Criticism

02/18/16

Urine Town Review

Urine Town, put on by Ohio University Theater Division & School of Music, is the epitome of a bad musical; yet, that's exactly what they are going for. Spoofing the Broadway art form and multiple shows in particular, the show keeps you laughing, rolling your eyes, and on the brink of whether or not you love it or hate it.

The musical opens on a desolate wasteland made purely of metal and lit with lime green. It appears purposefully grimy and is so foggy you could barely make out the archways at the back of the stage, much less tell if your glasses were still on. A small and talented orchestra is displayed in a sectioned-off box on stage. There was no room for a pit since the actors crossed off the stage and into the isles in order to break the fourth wall at every opportunity.

The audience is greeted by narrator Officer Lockstock, Colin Cardille, a cunning and greasy-type character who loves to tell the people how it is and remind us that this is not a happy musical. He explains that in this time, after the "Stink Years" the town remains in a 20 year drought. In order to conserve water, Lockstock explains that all bathrooms have become "public property owned by a private company," forcing all citizens to pay if they have to pee. The Officer often appears with Little Sally, Bri McCabe, whom is your stereotypical, sweet child who knows too much through her innocence. She questions the existence of Urine Town, the place where all those who pee freely are shipped out to spend the rest of their days. The juxtaposition of these characters makes for an interesting dynamic in narration, although combined they purposefully divulge too much too soon. "Nothing ruins a musical like too much expedition," Lockstock explains to Little Sally. In each appearance, it becomes quickly apparent that they intend to do just that at every chance they get. They also make the point of interrupting the show at inopportune times, harking on the idea that Broadway loves to do this as well.

The show is strewn with well-timed jokes on musical theatre, but it's the subtle and awkward quirks that keep you unsure if you should chuckle or cringe. For example, in near every scene change there's a

new sign hung up to explain where the characters are on the minimalistic set. When “surprised” by someone or their comment, the actors yell “WHAAAT?” as though it wasn’t obvious enough there was yet another plot twist. The red spot lights to signal romance, the pointed narration comments to over emphasize the already excessive metaphors to the audience and really blow through that nonexistent fourth wall, and the intimate moments between couples where the chorus makes it apparent they’re still there and watching...the purposeful cheesiness is ongoing.

Urine Town plays up all the aspects of theatre that make a show fall flat. Although brilliantly well done at times, one can’t help but wonder if it has gone too far. There is only so much spoofing one show can do. By hamming-up a performance to accentuate how the art form can go over-the-top and fail, the show in turn will go over the top and fail.

This is not to say however, that this particular production is not worth watching. The beautifully-written music is performed perfectly by these talented actors. Kristin Conrad’s vocals in her role as Penelope Pennywise will keep you in your seat and keep you wondering how she came to have such an incredible range. The warm voice of Jarahme Pollock, playing Bobby Strong, paired with the clear sound from his opposite, Bradley McKelvey-Askin, playing Hope Cladwell, will induce chills at each duet. The 11 person Orchestra plays near nonstop for the full two hours, and nails every key and genre change. All and all if you’re going to see the show, see it for its quirkiness, and incredible talent. Although they don’t give it away in their performance, one just can’t help but wonder if these actors wished they had been cast in a different show this season. Maybe one that was more legitimate art, and a less in-your-face satire of art.