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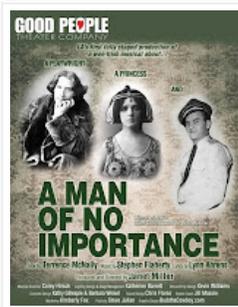
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Wednesday, June 5, 2013

review - A Man of No Importance



CRITIC'S PICK

A Man of No Importance

book by Terrence McNally; music by Stephen Flaherty & lyrics by Lynn Ahrens

directed by Janet Miller

inaugural production of Good People Theatre Company

Lillian Theatre

through June 30

What a treat to see a brand new theatre company present such a fine opening show like *A Man of No Importance!* Winner of the 2003 Outer Critics Circle Award in New York as Best *Off-Broadway* Musical, *Man...*, based on a 1994 film starring Albert Finney, tells a simple but

rich story of an ordinary bus conductor in Dublin in 1964 who invests his poetic soul in the spirit of Oscar Wilde and comes up all the richer. Now onstage at the Lillian Theatre in Hollywood, *A Man of No Importance* is a triumph for Good People and director Janet Miller, who has assembled a fantastic cast.

Alfie Byrne (Dominic McChesney) takes bus tickets by day, but by night, is a devoted director of community theatre at Saint Imelda's Catholic Church. They have produced *The Importance of Being Earnest* and his latest endeavor *Salome* is frowned upon by Father Kenny (Terrence Evans) as blasphemous due to its flagrant depiction of violence and lewd sexual behavior. So from the start it's doomed, but Byrne and his company forge on through arduous rehearsals. Byrne pleads with new bus passenger, fresh and pretty Adele Rice (Audrey Curd) to play the princess Salome, but his attraction is strictly professional. His real attraction is to bus driver Robbie Fay (Keith Barletta), but it is the unspoken love, after all, so like a good Catholic, Byrne keeps his feelings locked within, lying to his sister Lily (Shirley Anne Hatton) who true to form like any good Irish sister, lives to find him a good wife. The butcher Carney (David Gilchrist) envisions himself a true thespian, but when it comes to objectionable material, he refuses to keep his mouth shut and brings about the ruination of the production which is cancelled by the Parrish. Gilchrist also beautifully plays the spirit of Oscar Wilde, a delectable 360 degree turn in dynamics.



What emerges in *A Man of No Importance* is a world of middle-class folk who struggle by day and live to find some kind of comfort and reward in their meager participation in creating art by night. They are not professionals by any means, but earnest and sincere in their attempts to perhaps encounter a minor salvation under Byrne's friendly guidance - and in a church no less, where art and spirituality are

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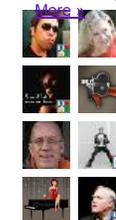
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bound to clash! These scenes are so comedically written by the brilliant Terrence McNally who really has an eye for creating character and a wit for sharp dialogue. Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty of *Ragtime* and *Once On This Island* fame, are tops as well at presenting a people and its culture in varying stages of development and growth through the music and lyrics they fashion. This creative team is a marriage made in heaven, and with Janet Miller as director who brings warmth, care and love to this production, it could not get any better. The Lillian stage is so expansive, but is perfect for the staging of this show, as it's not the sets that matter, but the actors creating art up front. They make magic via Miller's efficient and expertly conveyed staging, utilizing every crook and cranny of the vast space.



As to the cast, what a dream! McChesney as Byrne has the basic look and all the right emotional makeup to play Alfie. He never forces pity, only respect and support. Hatton as Lily is superb. A magnificent singer and actress, she, like Byrne, knows her character from the inside out. Curd is wonderfully fragile as Miss Rice, winning over the audience from her very first entrance. Barletta is perfectly playful as Robbie

and Gilchrist steals every scene with his egomaniacal presence. Evans went on as Father Kenny with very little time for rehearsal and made the part his own. Other standouts in the 15 member ensemble are Gail Matthius as Mrs. Curtin - delightful with her veils in "Art", Mary Chesterman as stonefaced Mrs Grace, Matt Stevens as Baldy, really connecting to "The Cuddles Mary Gave", and Matt Franta as sweet Peter and the bold, brash Breton Beret. Praise also to Marci Richmond Herrera, Corky Loupe, Michael P. Wallot, Melina Kalomas, and Bret Shefter. This is truly a dream ensemble! A four-piece Irish orchestra in full view onstage under the musical direction of Corey Hirsch are priceless.

Do not miss ***A Man of No Importance!*** If you're seeking a piece with heart and soul and a touch of pure Irish lyricism, its rollicking sense of humor and untethered simplistic beauty will take your breath away. This is by far one of my favorite productions so far this year! Bravo to Janet Miller and to everyone in Good People Theatre Company!

5 out of 5 stars

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