



Review: Funny Girl

Description

Play is a rich experience.

By Byron Toben

Theatre is a collaborative effort. So who contributed the most to the don't miss musical "Funny Girl" now at the Segal Centre?

Was it Jule Styne, the legendary composer or lyricist Bob Merrill, who created the original 1964 Broadway show?

Was it Barbra Streisand, who starred in that show as well as the 1968 film, for which she shared an Academy Award with Katherine Hepburn?

Was it this current version's director, Peter Hinton, with lots of inventiveness, nuance and glitter?

Going back way when, was it the spectacular producer Flo Ziegfeld whose successive Ziegfeld Follies in the '20s and '30s catapulted little funny wise-ass Fanny Brice to stardom?

And of course, was it the driven, confident lady herself who sort of created the idea of the female comic, foreshadowing Lucille Ball, Carol Burnett, Joan Rivers and the list goes on?

The answer, my friends is not blowing in the wind, but "all of the above" past and present.

Special kudos to McGill music grad Gabi Epstein who impressively puts her own stamp on as Fanny... fine comedic talent and powerful voice. John Ulyatt as her gambler lover, Nicky Arnstein is perfect both in song and characterization. Corrine Koslo garners laughs as Fanny's mom and Lorne Kennedy as Ziegfeld, is the very model of a major Impresario. Kyle Golemba as Eddie Ryan, Fanny's faithful platonic buddy adds balance to the central 5 person cast.



The 13 others in the supporting ensemble include local funny gal talents Danette MacKay and Felicia Shulman. As usual, the Segal has great production value, especially the choreography credited to Dayna Tekatch.

Many great comedic talents, from the fictional clown Pagliaccio to the late Robin Williams have despondent inner cores, as shown in this show, but in addition, Fanny weathers it all, like the unsinkable Molly Brown. For more insight, read Caitlin Murphy's interview with Peter Hinton on pages 8 and 9 of the program.

Nineteen clever songs pepper the soundscape, commencing with "If a Girl Isn't Pretty" and ending with "Who Are You Now". In between, are such as the hit single "Don't Rain On My Parade" and WW I novelty "Rat-Tat-Tat". All the songs backed by a lush quintet of piano, violin, cello, woodwind, bass and drums.

One of my favorite scenes is during a fabulous Ziegfeld Busby Berkley-like parade honoring American bride beauties. Fanny pulls an unscripted stunt that nearly gets her fired, but audience reaction results in a "keeper".

Funny Girl continues at the Segal Centre, now extended until November 8.

Tickets at 514 288-7044 or segalcentre.org/

Images: Andrée Lanthier

Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.

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