

TA's Glorious! The True Story of Florence Foster Jenkins, the Worst Singer in the World

Continuing this season's theme of The Mighty Heroine, Theatre Aurora's latest play is the comedy 'Glorious!: The True Story of Florence Foster Jenkins, the Worst Singer in the World'.

The title pretty much tells the story. Florence Foster Jenkins was a socialite and horrible amateur singer in New York in the 1940s. Convinced by both herself and her supportive friends that she was a terrific soprano, she made recordings of favourite opera arias, and performed a series of successful concerts before carefully selected audiences.

Despite, or perhaps because of, her dubious talents, and elaborate homemade costumes, she became a favourite of many famous musical stars of that era, including Cole Porter, who apparently never missed one of her shows, and she even performed at a sold-out Carnegie Hall.

Producer Neill Kernohan, Director Judi Cragg and the rest of their Theatre Aurora team have put together a wonderful adaptation of this play by Peter Quilter.

As the title character, Ann Smith is, well, glorious. Ms. Smith uses her musical training to make her character's voice just wonderfully atrocious. Better yet, the songs are accompanied by a bewildering variety of the most convoluted and amusing facial expressions. She truly brings the warm, confident and seemingly oblivious Florence Foster Jenkins to life.

Another cast standout is Tim Gernstein as pianist Cosme McMoon. We meet this character as he is being hired as the singer's new accompanist. While McMoon has only started, Mr. Gerstein makes him appear like he is already long-suffering.

The actor also nicely shows the evolution of the pianist's feelings, as his alarm and reactions to what he's hearing shifts through the play into a genuine affection and support for the title character.

Phillip Cook and Deborah Lobban as supportive friends St Clair and Dorothy, and Elisa Cor as the frustrating non-English speaking maid Maria provide excellent additional comic relief throughout.

Lise Boily has the rather thankless role of Mrs. Verrinder-Gedge, a very vocal and unsympathetic opponent of Jenkins.

There is a great deal of humour in this production, from the script's excellent asides and one-liners, to the expressions and physical comedy, and of course, the 'glorious' singing.

It provides an amusing and very enjoyable wrap-up to the theatre's current season.

Don't miss it.

Evening performances of 'Glorious! The True Story of Florence Foster Jenkins, the Worst Singer in the World' continue at Theatre Aurora, 150 Henderson Drive, April 20, 21, 22, 27, 28 and 29, with a matinee on April 23. Tickets are available through the box office at 905-727-3669.

By Scott Johnston