

Theatre Aurora presents: A Grand Night for Singing



A Review by Scott Johnston

Changing things up right off the bat, Theatre Aurora kicks off its latest season not with a play, but a revue.

'A Grand Night for Singing' includes a variety of songs featuring the best music and lyrics of the famed duo of composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II. Together, they created some of the most famous musicals of the mid 20th century, many of which are represented in this show.

You'll hear favourites from *The King and I*, *Oklahoma*, *South Pacific*, *State Fair* and *The Sound of Music*, amongst many others. There are also some lesser-known numbers thrown in.

The use of graphics on the backdrop and monitors helps set the scene for each song, but overall, this is a very simply staged show in that there are none of the elaborate costumes and sets associated with big musicals.

Instead, using a simple two-level stage for the performers, with a band in the background, the cast is required to do the heavy lifting, or in this case singing, to make the show a success. And do they ever.

The five performers, Abi Oliphant, Jeff McAlister, Liisa Kallasmaa, Rebecca Rodley and Stefan Porfirio wonderfully shift from quiet romantic love songs like 'If I Loved You' from *Carousel*, to fun, lively numbers such as *South Pacific*'s 'I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa of My Hair'. All excellent singers, they bring terrific emotion, reactions and humour to their characters in each song.

Many of the musical numbers feature a lot of movement and take advantage of the entire stage, thanks to choreographer Kendall Zurowski.

Equally important in all of this is the music. The band, consisting of Jimmy Tao (Piano 2), Andrew Ferguson (Bass), Ivan Chu (Cello), Frederick Lock (Reeds), Marc Siversky (drums), and under the direction of Ernesto De Luca (Piano 1), sounds like a much bigger musical group. Despite this, they wonderfully support the singers, without overpowering them, or missing a note.

From the cast to the band, and the choreography to the lighting, Director Neill Kernohan has done a great job pulling this all together and maintaining the show's pacing.

Whether or not you're familiar with the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein, watching Theatre Aurora's latest offering will provide

you with a grand night (or matinee) in Aurora, and likely leave you humming a few tunes as you leave the theatre.

Evening performances of 'A Grand Night for Singing' continue at Theatre Aurora, 150 Henderson Drive, September 19, 20, 25, 26 and 27, with matinees September 20, 21 and 27. Tickets are available through the box office at 905-727-3669.