

Theatre Aurora presents: Assassins



A Review by Scott Johnston

Theatre Aurora continues this season's theme of murder and mayhem with the Tony award winning ?Assassins?.

Although the title makes it sound like a mystery thriller, it's actually a musical, with a book by John Weidman, and music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.

The story starts in a creepy carnival, with an equally mysterious Proprietor, who introduces the various men and women who have attempted, successfully or not, to assassinate American presidents, from Lincoln to Reagan.

With the Proprietor as our guide, the plot examines each assassination attempt.

What were the conditions in the country at the time? What motivated the shooters? How did their actions inspire those who followed? These and other questions are explored through the story and songs.

This is more a philosophical play than a physical one. For example, while the mindset of the characters is heavily explored, sometimes through the interaction of characters from different time periods, none of the assassination attempts are portrayed on stage.

The music has been chosen to reflect each time period, which helps as the events in the play do not take place in chronological order. The song lyrics are entertaining, and in some cases thought-provoking.

Although some of the characters are little-known to Canadians, an understanding of American history is not required, as enough information is provided on stage to identify each character. For those who may want to brush up a bit beforehand, the show's program has brief bios of each assassin.

The play is well-paced and the lack of intermission helps keep things moving.

The set is very basic, which makes sense as so many different scenes and time periods are portrayed. This also helps to focus attention on the actors.

As for the cast, it is a large one. Even then, many of the performers appear as more than one character, such as a killer in one scene and a president in another.

The cast includes Jaime Brown as Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, Sergio Calderon as John Wilkes Booth, David Cardinal as Balladeer/Proprietor, Trevor Cartlidge as Charles Guiteau, Ed Ho as Leon Czolgosz, Kerry Hobbs as Emma Goldman, Ivan Hutomo as Lee Harvey Oswald, Stefan Porfirio as Guiseppe Zangara, Mitchell Rozen as John Hinkley Jr., Sandra Salvatore-Spaventa as Sara Jane Moore, and Glen Warren as Samuel Byck.

Overall, the acting and singing throughout is very strong.

Although an unusual concept, and potentially not for everyone, this play works well in its exploration of the changing times in America, and what makes a certain type of people tick.

Evening performances of ?Assassins? continue at Theatre Aurora, 150 Henderson Drive, November 28, 29 and 30, and December 5, 6 & 7, with a matinee on December 1. Tickets are available through the box office at 905-727-3669.