

## Iron Curtain: The Great Red Way

by [Jena Tesse Fox](#)

Oh, there's nothing like a good old-fashioned musical comedy! The jokes, the innocence, the happy endings, the easy-on-the-ear tuneful melodies! Nothing else can put such a grin on one's face, nothing else can make you forget your troubles and make the world seem a-ok. And nothing else I've seen in New York this season quite captures the spirit of an old-fashioned musical comedy like *Iron Curtain*, enjoying its premiere at the West End Theatre. Cheekily spoofing every major musical tradition from Broadway's Golden Age, *Iron Curtain* is a heart-shaped box of theatrical candy for every fan of the genre.



There is something in this show for everyone to enjoy: clever historical references, clever theatrical references, silly jokes, groan-inducing puns, and delightful songs. The story, such as it is, follows two eager young musical writers who, at the height of the Cold War, are kidnaped and brought to Moscow to write a new Soviet musical comedy. (Don't think about it too much. Just enjoy the ride.) One falls in love with the musical-within-a-musical's ingenue, while the other pines for his girl back home. Nikita Khrushchev promises to bury our heroes in fan mail, the KGB is watching everyone, and no one is who they seem. It's as dizzy and daffy as you could want a musical comedy to be, and just cleverly witty enough to keep the audience on their collective toes. References to the Cold War and *Oklahoma!* and *Damn Yankees!* and other musicals with exclamation points abound; one does not need to know much about Cold War history or Golden Age musicals to enjoy *Iron Curtain*, but it would help.

Stephen Weiner's catchy music captures the bright spirit of the old-fashioned musicals. Peter Mills' lyrics, once again, would make Cole Porter wonder "Why didn't I rhyme that?" (For example, in one of his signature triple-rhymes, he finds a way to connect "four of us" and "more of us" with "orifice.") There are precious few lyricists out there who have as much fun with the English language as Mr. Mills does. Susan DiLallo's book doesn't quite live up to the brilliant score, relying too frequently on old and obvious puns and jokes that weren't all that funny in the 1950's. She shows plenty of promise, though, with plenty of witty banter and clever references that overcome the weak points, and is a name worth watching.

As the hapless writers, Jeff Edgerton and Marcus Neville share a wonderful chemistry and excellent comic timing, performing very well on their own but much better as a pair. It's not difficult to imagine them as Bialystock and Bloom in a few years. As the cunning ingenue, Jessica Grové conjures images of both Jean Harlow and Mata Hari with equal aplomb, and shines vocally whether belting or singing legit soprano. Maria Couch is charming and winsome as

Neville's loyal and fearless girlfriend, raising her character well above a one-joke role. Bethe B. Boston, playing a conflicted KGB agent and choreographer, is stronger in the first act than the second, in which she speaks in a shrill child's voice for laughs. Funny though she is in every other way, this particular facet is grating and distracting. [Gordon Stanley](#) and Larry Brustofski score plenty of laughs as the show-within-a-show's producer and KGB overseer. The ensemble of seven, many of them alumni of other Peter Mills/Prospect productions, fill up the stage with an abundance of charm and energy and beautifully pull off Christine O'Grady's Berkley-esque choreography. Nick Francone's red, white, and blue set is perfectly utilitarian, and Sidney Shannon's lovely costumes convey character before the actors open their mouths.

It is comforting to know that while Broadway seems overwhelmed with spectacle shows and vanity productions, Prospect Theatre Company continues to produce well-written, intelligent, and fun original musicals for a much friendlier price. If you want to see the future of American theatre, head over to the West End Theatre.

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