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A CurtainUp Review *Iron Curtain*

*Ah! what a sorry state I'm in;
Split! Like the city of Berlin --- Hildret, the teutonic director
who lusts for one of the kidnapped American songsmiths and
ends up wondering wistfully " Is it true what they say? A frau
divided. . .must fall!"*

Instead of a small town barn, the Prospect Theater Company, has brought their *let's put on a show* spirit to the tiny theater on the second floor of a church on Manhattan's upper West Side. *Iron Curtain*, the company's new 1950s era musical comedy about a pair of wannabe Broadway songsmiths kidnapped by the KGB to inject some Yankee pizzazz into a USSR propaganda musical.

This show has no big name performers or glitzy sets with smoke, mirrors and chandeliers. What it does have is a deliciously ditzy book by Susan Dilallo, song after melodic song by Stephen Weiner with devilishly clever lyrics by Peter Mills. And talent galore to sing and dance up a storm without any amplification. That chance to hear a full-fledged book musical performed without head mikes or any other gadgetry to interfere with the natural voices, is in itself a rare enough pleasure unlikely to be part of the scheme of things in the event some producer decides to give this fun show the legs for a longer commercial run.

For a small budget show, *Iron Curtain* boasts a large cast (14 strong) as well as a 9-piece orchestra neatly tucked away in a space at the side of the stage, and a multi-level

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set complete with roll-out props for various locations by Nick Francone. You have to see the size of the stage to really appreciate Francone's versatility.

Under Cara Reichel's direction the zany plot takes composer Murray (Jeff Edgerton) and his best friend and partner pencil-chewing lyricist Howard (Marcus Neville) from one premeditatedly silly situation to another: first auditioning their latest venture for a New York producer; visiting Howard's girlfriend Shirley (Maria Couch) at the restaurant where she waitresses; answering a mysterious ad from a producer named Onanov (Gordon Stanley) and landing mouths taped and hands tied in the USSR, courtesy of Schmearnov (Larry Brustofski), Onanov's prop assistant whose equipment comprises all manner of kidnapping (and worse) paraphernalia. In Russia, they meet a riding crop yielding teutonic director named Hildret (Bethe B. Austin whose name is another sly bit of punning) and Masha, a Russian blonde bombshell (Jessica Grove) with whom Murray falls in love.

While more than a little reminiscent of *The Producers*, this big little show also resembles those golden oldie Road movies starring Bing Crosby and Bob Hope. But for all the premeditated silliness, the songs are so tightly woven into the plot that it's hard to break out any one as a free-standing hit -- shades of *The Threepenny Opera* in which one one song, "Mac the Knife", became a breakout number. As long as I'm bringing up *Threepenny*, Hildret's "A Frau Divided" is marvelously Brechtian, though there's also plenty of sweetness to offset such dark, noirish humor -- notably Shirley's "Missing."

As with Prospect's memorable *The Pursuit of Persephone* (music & lyrics by Mills and directed by Reichel --[review](#)), *Iron Curtain* would benefit from some judicious trimming - - dropping a stanza here and there and since, the songs so effectively elucidate the character conflicts and situations, tightening the spoken dialogue.

I'm posting this review more than half way through it's run, so plan to catch it before it's final curtain and don't bank on it having that future life it deserves.

IRON CURTAIN

Music by Stephen Weiner

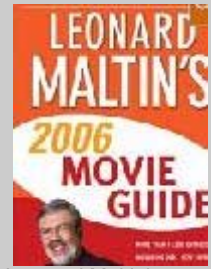
Lyrics by Peter Mills

Book by Susan Dilallo

Directed by Cara Reichel

Choreographed by Christine O'Grady

Cast: Jeff Edgerton (Murray), Marcus Neville (Howard), Gordon Stanley (Onanov), Larry Brustofski (Schmearnov), Maria Couch (Shirley), Beth B. Austin (Hildret), Jessica Grove (Masha), Amber Dow (Olga / Ensemble), Dara Seitzman (Ticket Agent / Ensemble), Doug Shapiro (Producer / Underling / Ensemble), Brad York (Khrushchev / Cop / Ensemble), Robby Sharpe (Desk Clerk / Ensemble), David S. Miller



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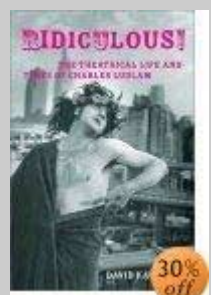


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(Super ! Ensemble), Rich Silverstein (Border Guard / Ensemble)
 Set Design: Nick Francone
 Costume Design: Sidney J. Shannon
 Lighting Design: Stephen Arnold
 Sound Design: Yoshi D. Lee
 Music Director: Daniel Feyer
 Running time: 2 1/2 hours, with one 15 minute intermission
 Prospect Theater Company at West End Theatre 263 West 86th Street
 (Broadway/West End Avenue in the Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew,
 second floor) 212-352-3101
 From 4/08/06 to 4/30/06.
 Thu to Sat at 8pm; Sun at 3pm.
 Tickets: \$18; \$15 students/seniors
 Reviewed by **Elyse Sommer** based on March 16th matinee performance

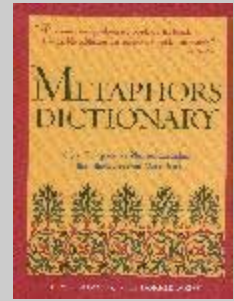
Musical Numbers

Act One

- Prologue / Ensemble
- Sorriest Team Around / Murray, Howard, Shirley
- The Ministry of Musical Persuasion / Onanov, Schmearnov, Ensemble
- Missing / Shirley
- The Lapov Luxury / Schmearnov, Ensemble
- Sorriest Team Around (Reprise) / Murray, Howard
- Harvest Moon Masha, Ensemble
- Missing (Reprise) / Shirley
- We'll Make It / Murray, Howard, Onanov, Masha, Ensemble
- The Party Line / Schmearnov, Hildret, Masha
- The Interrogation / Hildret, Howard
- We Made It / Murray, Howard
- Act I Finale / Ensemble

Act Two

- That's Capital / Masha, Onanov, Murray, Ensemble
- Half a World Away / Howard, Murray
- Five Year Plan / Murray
- A Frau Divided / Hildret
- If Not for Musicals / Onanov, Ensemble
- Eleven O'Clock Number / Hildret, Howard, Murray, Masha, Ensemble
- Finale / Ensemble



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