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THEATER REVIEW

## Behind the 'Iron Curtain,' Writing the Show Tunes of Lenin

By [NEIL GENZLINGER](#)

Sometimes it's nice to just leave your brains at the door when you enter a theater. And absolutely none are required for "Iron Curtain," a gleefully ridiculous new musical at the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew that makes the cold war seem like the good ol' days.

"They don't write musicals like they used to," you may have heard more than once, but it turns out that isn't quite right. In this case, "they" — Susan DiLallo, book; Peter Mills, lyrics; Stephen Weiner, music; Christine O'Grady, choreography — certainly do, deliberately making this nutty story about a blundering theatrical team look and sound like something from a half-century ago.

That's when the story is set. In New York, Murray (Jeff Edgerton) and Howard (Marcus Neville) are an unsuccessful musical-writing team. (They come up with a swell idea for a show about a lovably losing baseball team, only to find that Adler and Ross have just inked a deal for a little thing called "Damn Yankees.") And in the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev (Brad York), it turns out, likes a good musical — and, more important, he doesn't like a bad musical, which is all the Soviet writers seem to produce. So in short order Murray and Howard are kidnapped, brought behind the Iron Curtain and ordered to improve Mother Russia's entertainment product.

There's only one way to play this kind of stuff: unabashedly. And the cast of this Prospect Theater Company production does, with two performers going all out: Gordon Stanley as Onanov (say it out loud and guess the pun), a producer for the Ministry of Musical Persuasion, and Beth B. Austin as Hildret, a Nazi-like director. And in a couple of duets, Mr. Edgerton and Mr. Neville sound just great.

Sure, "Iron Curtain" is working the formula of "The Producers" and other big-time shows. And yes, the premise is a little thin to support a 90-minute first act. But where else, for an \$18 ticket, can you hear "scrap it all" rhymed with "Das Kapital"?

*"Iron Curtain" continues through April 30 at the West End Theater, Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, 263 West 86th Street; (212) 352-3101.*