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NEW THEATER CORPS

AN INSIGHTFUL LOOK AT WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE NEW YORK STAGE

THEATER TALK has enlisted a group of up-and-coming, young theater professionals to see and review some of the latest stage productions in the NY Tri-State area.

We hope the comments they post on this blog will be useful.

SUNDAY, APRIL 09, 2006

Iron Curtain by Aaron Riccio

While *Iron Curtain* may have a steely, menacing title, this new musical premiering at Prospect Theater Company is actually a warm, friendly comedy. If it forgets to be funny in the second act, it's just a momentary (and necessary) break to indulge in some sweet romance and a welcome pause that lets the audience catch its breath after all the laughing. The endgame still needs some work, and the pacing is a little too reliant on stream-of-consciousness punning (enough to beat a dead horse), but the casting is terrific and carries the day.

Murray and Howard are "The Sorriest Team Around," an odd couple of songwriters who can't catch a break. Their luck changes after they are "recruited" (read: abducted) by Onanov Broadway, a Russian front for "The Ministry of Musical Persuasion" in the USSR, and "encouraged" (forced) to fix the currently running musical, *Okastroma*. Enconced in the Lapov Luxury (not as nice as it sounds) they decide to adapt their show *Faust Ball* into a pro-communist hit called *Damnable Yankees*. Yes, *Iron Curtain* affords many opportunities for puns of all persuasions, growing to a climax with "That's Capital," the Act II opening. Even the sinister plots—Schmearnov of the KGB believes them to be spies—give in to humor: "The Party Line" is actually a kick-dancing line (and Schmearnov a sultry cabaret act), and "If Not for Musicals" is a chorus line salute that makes evil communists about as threatening as Hitler in *The*

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Freak Winds
SHOW PEOPLE, by Matt Windman
Freak Winds

Producers.

If *Iron Curtain* seems artificial, it's only in homage to traditional fifties musicals, and gets away with it with tons of parody. I wish the lyrics and music (by Peter Mills and Stephen Weiner, respectively) were less sophomoric (only "A Frau Divided" pushes the envelope vocally), but each song is unique enough to breeze by with good humor to spare. Susan DiLallo's book, however, only has a good story: the dialogue relies far too much on two-liners and a recapitulation of what the songs have already covered. Still, the actors deliver their lines with such good faith that *Iron Curtain* just oozes warmth.

Jeff Edgerton, who plays the romantic Murray, is perhaps the culprit there: aside from having a solid and sincere tenor voice, he's also charming, and a perfect foil for the cynical Howard (played by Marcus Neville). The only consideration is that these two have far better chemistry with each other than with their romances, Masha (Jessica Grove) and Shirley (Maria Couch), though that's more a failure of the script than of the heart. There's no doubt, after all, that either of the two can sing, although the acoustics often swallowed Couch's words, and the sporadic spotlight sometimes cut off her head. Slight mishaps, both, under the otherwise excellent direction of Cara Reichel, whose only real problem was finding something believable for the chorus to do in "Eleven O'Clock Number," the only poorly choreographed song.

I mention these gaffes lightly because of how otherwise enjoyable *Iron Curtain* is. There isn't a bad song in the bunch, nor does it lack the enthusiasm for them. The overall theme is a bit shallow, but that's just a sure-fire way to avoid drowning in bathos, and when all's said and done, *Iron Curtain* comes out smelling like a nice, Red rose.

West End Theater (263 West 86th Street)

Tickets (212-352-3101): \$18.00

Performances: Thursday-Saturday @ 8:00/Sunday @ 3:00

by Aaron Riccio

Freak Winds

Heiner Muller: A Man Without A
Behind

Heiner Müller: A Man Without a
Behind

"Full Bloom" shines at Vital
Baby Girl

Mercy on the Doorstep

One Man's War

