

FEB

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review - Closer Than Ever

CRITIC'S PICK

Closer Than Ever

lyrics by Richard Maltby Jr./music by David Shire

Good People Theatre Company

at Hollywood Piano, Burbank

through March 15



Let's add one more team of musical composers to the list of legendary greats. On my list, among others, there are Rodgers and Hammerstein, Rodgers and Hart, Lerner and Lowe, Kander and Ebb; we'll now include ***Maltby and Shire***. They have written for film and Broadway. Maltby conceived and directed the multi award-winning *Ain't Misbehavin'* and together they penned Broadway's *Baby*.

They are also responsible for many musical revues revolving around love. One of them ***Closer Than Ever*** took its initial bows at Williamstown, Massachusetts in 1989 and came to Broadway to much success. In fact, it spawned a recording with stars Sally Mayes and Brent Barrett. Somehow the show is rarely revived, which is a crying shame. It has some of the best music ever composed and even though there is no dialogue between the two pairs of actors, that's right... no book, ***Closer Than Ever*** is often referred to as the nonbook ***book musical***, since its tiny stories when layered on top of one another produce a plot, or almost. What is reflected are the ins and outs of love in relationships young and old, single and married with as much or more depth and introspection than a Sondheim musical such as *A Little Night Music...* or Jason Robert Brown's *The Last Five Years*. To give an example, as I sat and listened to the current splendid revival by Good People Theatre Company at Hollywood Piano in Burbank, I could practically feel ***every day a little death, every day a little sting*** from ... *Night Music* in "Patterns", a deeply reflective number about the patterns of one's life, sung here by Jessie Withers. Like Sondheim, Maltby and Shire succeed in bringing home the image of inevitable stagnation as well progression in everyday living.



All of the songs, performed by Withers and Sara Stuckey and two male actors, Gabriel Kalomas and David Zack under the musical supervision of fabulous Corey Hirsch and staging by consummate director Janet Miller, reverberate dynamically. You can feel a connection to what the people are talking about, whether it be unrequited love in "She Loves Me Not", a regret of what might have been in "Life Story", life catching up too fast in "The March of Time" or appreciating/ relishing what your father has taught you in "If I Sing". The messages really resonate. There is stylish humor present, but the texture is ultimately more serious than comic.

Stuckey, Withers, Kalomas, Zack ... and Hirsch - as he beautifully relays "If I Sing" - are magnificent singers/actors and move in and around and out of the space with great dramatic flair. Miller has staged the piece in a recital room at Hollywood Piano. The stage is small; performers move in and out of the door of the room, through the audience and onto the stage, sometimes sitting on the sidelines between numbers, or making exits after big dramatic moments, and quiet or brisk entrances for the next. It's almost like watching a play unfold. The space and piece seem a perfect match for one another.

Closer Than Ever - what a joyful experience! Congrats also to bass player Brenton Kossak for fine additional accompaniment!

5 out of 5 stars

