

BWW Reviews: Good People's MARRY ME A LITTLE Takes Pleasingly Gentle Approach with Sondheim Revue

June 22 11:32 AM
2015

by Don Grigware



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Marry Me a Little/music by **Stephen Sondheim**

/conceived & developed by **Craig Lucas & Norman Rene**/directed by **Janet Miller**/musical direction by **Corey Hirsch**/Lillian Theater/Good People Theatre Company; part of Hollywood Fringe Festival June 4-28:/<http://www.hollywoodfringe.org/projects/2234?tab=tickets>

During the crazy broohaha of the Hollywood Fringe Festival, there are plenty of loud, over.the.top noisy shows, if that suits your pleasure. Sondheim's *Marry Me a Little* is a quiet, gentle little 60-minute musical revue that just doesn't fit that bill. And

that's totally fine by me! I prefer Sondheim anyway. In *Marry Me a Little*, conceived by **Craig Lucas** and **Norman Rene**, many of the songs are from the then - late 90s - unproduced *Saturday Night* coupled with a multitude of songs cut from hits like *Company*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. It's a two-person intimate show on the vast Lillian stage and as usual **Janet Miller** has staged the piece adeptly with lots of tender loving care.

The plotline is simple enough. Two people who live in a NYC apartment complex 2C and 3C are aware of one another, but have never met. They are two lonely people, alone on a Saturday night dreaming and wishing what it would be like to perhaps get to know each other, spending quality time together. As staged by Miller, the two never face each other but every once in awhile when one passes by the other, there's a quiet, quick recognition of the other's presence, sometimes pleasant, sometimes not. Relationships, even when imagined, are complex. By the end of the show depending on your point of view, as each takes his place on opposite sides of the bed, you may realize that being alone with your dreams is not all that bad. Think of Bobby's dilemma in *Company*! Should he get married or stay single? It took Sondheim years to finally figure out what he wanted to say, as finale songs kept changing.

Jessie Withers and David Laffey play the singles in *Marry Me a Little*, moving around each other as in a lovely dreamlike ballet. Miller has them actually dancing at certain moments - alone and with each other - which adds a lovely imaginative quality. Lucas and Rene have cleverly arranged the musical numbers to tell the story without a word of dialogue. As it's all sung, it's nice when two actors are cast that can really sing. Laffey and Withers are most definitely up to the challenges of every Sondheim nuance, as well as difficult - some consider them impossible - transitions in chords. Corey Hirsch lovingly accompanies on the keyboard.

Some of the most riveting numbers from ***Saturday Night*** include "So Many People", "A Moment with You" as well as the title song. Other memorable songs are "Can That Boy Foxtrot", "All Things Bright and Beautiful", and "It Wasn't Meant to Happen", all cut from *Follies*; "Multitudes of Amys", "Marry Me a Little", and "Happily Ever After" - a whole different spin from "Being Alive" which ended up being the closing number of *Company*; "Two Fairy Tales" and "Silly People" cut from *Night Music*; and "There Won't Be Trumpets" from *Anyone Can Whistle*. There's nothing quite like a Sondheim tune to move the story along; it simultaneously adds clarity or complexity as well as beautiful sublime harmony to the big picture.

One really appealing feature, at least for me, is the casting. I am sick and tired of seeing Hollywood, model perfect actors. Both Laffey and Withers are first and foremost great singers and performers... with average good looks and are a tad overweight, as opposed to Hollywood glamorous. They look like ordinary folks...and that's what Sondheim is talking about...

Thank you, **Janet Miller**, Corey Hirsch, David Laffey and Jessie Withers for your craftsmanship in making good theatre come alive. I have always believed that the best theatre is not in luxurious sets and costumes - there's only a bed and two straightback chairs here - but, in what's up front. Can the actors sing and can they pull me into the story? In ***Marry Me a Little***, most definitely, yes, yes, yes!! Once again, **Janet Miller's** vision is so clear, so pure. She appreciates Sondheim's artistry and knows how to convey it simply and most beautifully.

Don't miss ***Marry Me a Little*** in its final six performances. Check the link below.

<http://www.hollywoodfringe.org/projects/2234?tab=tickets>