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Sondheim Well Served

“MARRY ME A LITTLE” (Gold Medal)

Stephen Sondheim’s 1980 “Marry Me A Little” is akin to one those really excellent Japanese hors-d’oeuvre bars, where nothing is served but side dishes. The comparison is applicable because “Marry Me A Little” conceived by Craig Lucas and Norman René, is a review of songs culled from Sondheim’s major works – “A Little Night Music”, “Company”, and others, as well as a number of songs cut from Sondheim’s epic “Follies”. Songs that, like everything that flows from Sondheim’s pen, are gems in and of themselves, but which have been overshadowed by such towering tuneful touchstones as “Send In the Clowns”, “Losing My Mind”, “A Comedy Tonight” and “I’m Still Here”. With “Marry Me A Little” you can hear them, as if for the first, and appreciate their stunning artistry in what amounts to a mini-operetta.

The plot is rice paper thin. A man (David Laffey) spends Saturday night alone in his apartment longing for someone to share his life with. In the apartment directly above him a woman (Jessie Withers) is spending her Saturday night alone, also longing to have that special someone in her life. Producer/director Janet Miller has done a splendid job of overlapping the two separate lives onto the same simple set, thus highlighting how snugly their lives would bond if together, while simultaneously applying a light layer of pathos, in their oblivion to one another.

Both Laffey and Withers manage to make it seem as if this show was tailored made for them, and that they, and none other, either by an Act of Congress or Biblical commandment, shall ever be allowed to play these roles. There are some outstanding songs offered the audience, songs that reinforce why Sondheim all but dominated the realm of musical theatre these large few decades. Withers sizzles in her rendering the shrewdly suggestive “Can That Boy Foxtrot?” Laffey manages to keep topping himself in one number after the other, especially the ballad “Multitudes of Amy’s.” That they can stay apace of some of Sondheim’s more challenging airs such as “Two Fairy Tales” and “Bang” highlights their considerable chops and Miller’s impeccable staging. Katherine Barrett ably supports the concepts with her skillful lighting that provides structure to each scene’s shifting.

All in all a tip top presentation that I dare an audience not to enjoy. Musical director Corey Hirsch supplies the thirty piece orchestra. Okay minus twenty-nine other instruments, but you’d never know it.