



David C. Nichols

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Hollywood Fringe Festival Standout Alert:

With "Marry Me A Little," [Good People Theater Company](#) achieves a kind of cohesion that is rare enough in full-scale productions, but almost unheard of in the freewheeling, catch-as-catch-can whirled of the Fringe. It's not that Craig Lucas and Norman René's plotless 1981 construct of cut and/or little-heard songs from Stephen Sondheim's titanic canon has essentially changed in three-plus decades. It still follows two lonely Manhattanites, who live a floor away from each other, yet share the same theatrical space as they face yet another "Saturday Night" alone. What makes this particular reading so very special is the infinite subtlety with which director [Janet Miller](#) plies her wares, making certain that the intentions come from within the material without losing sight of the abstract objective -- this pair is obviously made for each other, if only they had any idea of the other's existence. Thus, things like a fluttered fan (deliciously punctuating "Bang!," cut from "A Little Night Music") or a slyly revolved chair (put to fine, judicious use in "Uptown, Downtown," cut from "Follies") register less as decorative details than as specific clues to these nameless characters' inner lives. And what inner lives Jessie Withers and David Laffey convey. Both are very attractive but recognizably human-scaled physical types, which only increases the believable stakes, demonstrating superb vocal abilities that surmount the range and emotional challenges of the songs by acting through the notes and lyrics, not on top of them. Indeed, if the young Toni Collette were morphed with Dawn Upshaw, and James Corden had a clarinet-voiced American cousin, here they'd be. Each has their particular standout moments -- she tickling the fancy with the louche insinuations of "Can That Boy Foxtrot," he stirring the soul with the emotional gyrations of "Multitudes of Amys" -- but it is in their joint interaction that the piece lands, most stunningly at "So Many People" and "Your Eyes Are Blue," when both interface directly for the first time. Enigmatic without heaviness, virtuosic without showiness, and, with invaluable music director [Corey Hirsch](#) pulling out all the stops, melodic without grandiosity, this is the first production of this work that has drawn both guffaws and sniffles from this reviewer since [Celebration Theatre's](#) celebrated male/male version. Samuel Beckett would not be ashamed of the ethos on display here, and nor, one suspects, would The Master whose songs it utilizes. In short, it's perfect, and should not be missed under any circumstances. Bravi a tutti, mille grazie, bis.