

Review: Falsettos
By Tom MacKan
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What's not to like about this opener for HTI's 2013–14 season? Not the gifted cast of the best of local musical theatre talent, that's for sure. Nor the disciplined and skilled direction and creative choreography of Sharon Reynolds, or the first rate command of the musical score by director Charlie Henderson, and his splendid "teeny" ensemble of skilled instrumentalists. There's everything to like about the backstage staff under Stage Manager Monica Cairney and her assistant Sarah Granger. No complaints about costumes by the ever marvelous Beryl Harrison, and nothing but praise for incidentals like furnishing, props, décor, make-up, hair styles, and wigs.

Well, wait. "Falsettos" is a loose synthesis of events in the lives of a Jewish New York family during the late 80s with a not very likeable central character. The tale is told in mostly sung recitative fashion. The arc of the telling needs clarity and its sung exposition is not an easy way of achieving this. Often we are into a scene several minutes before we know where we are and what's going on. One gets lost too often. It is not a minimalist plot yet it got a minimalist setting, hindering further this viewer's grasp of the progress of the story.

However... Sharon Reynolds tackled the choice from her love of the story, and we felt this throughout. She brings a wealth of musical production skills to her challenge and, blending her strong faith in the validity of the plot's conflict, she's guided us effectively through the struggle to a genuinely affecting realization of a sad contemporary comedy drama.

Casting is her big stick. As Marvin, a homosexual in a heteronormative world is Stephen Koshurba in an exacting performance. Koshurba has the intellect of an honest actor and a treasury of stage skills in voice, looks, and physical grace. Marvin is in a heterosexual marriage with Trina. They have a son in the early stages of puberty, Bar Mitzvah territory. Marvin has a male lover, Whizzer, and he believes he can behave homonormatively and still have a traditional family life. It takes Koshurba, the actor, to keep this situation from coming off the rails. With a delicate stick-handling performance, he keeps us on his side throughout because he's found the truth of Marvin, and in that we can believe he's not bad, he's awfully troubled. It's a true feat of delicate acting and Koshurba scores brilliantly in the role.

Greg Solomon is in town for this event and how stimulating is that! Greg plays Marvin's lover, Whizzer. We've seen Solomon in action before, and his Whizzer in this production is graduate work for a young actor. Fit and physically stunning he's the perfect foil for the Koshurba's Marvin. As important as sexual heat is for the realization of what is to come of the relationship between them (and both actors are not lacking here one bit), conflict is vital, antagonistic emotions must arise. Solomon is up to this task. He has not lost any of his gift for inhabiting a character, and his Whizzer is perfect.

Who but Beth Rogers-Cassey could play the stricken Trina, wife to Marvin and mother of his son. No question she has the musical depth, and how happy to report that for poise and variety in acting she brings Trina to sustained fullness admirably. Torn and conflicted, she turns for psychological help from Mendel,

and in Dustin Jodway the casting couldn't be better. On top of his game, Jodway knows the stage like a mechanic knows his Chevy. Actor, singer, hooper, Jodway creates Trina's saviour with such joy of performance we're thrilled.

How did Reynolds snag the adolescent stage genius of Jake Sim? Surrounded by all that seasoned talent as he is, this young lad acts, sings, and dances up in equal measure with the best. With enviable composure in stillness and inspiring vibrancy in action, Sim is a marvel.

In their supporting roles, the incomparable Lyla Miklos as Dr. Charlotte and the enchanting Melissa Todd as Cordelia round out the story's homonormative circle with visual and vocal perfection. Aids was emerging as a mysterious plague by 1989, and homosexuals were facing it utterly alone. Just as the lad Jason emerges into his adult man's world, Bar Mitzvah'd and safely heteronormative, Charlotte, Cordelia, Marvin and Whizzer are looking down the long barrel of uncertainty. "Falsettos" is not a walk in the park for HTI. It's a tricky journey taken with considerable success. Warmly recommended.

FALSETTOS

Until Nov. 30 @ Hamilton Theatre Inc.

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