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# Tulsa Project Theatre serves up a Broadway buffet.

July 29, 2011

5:31 AM MST

## Broadway Your Way

Rating: ★★★★★

The thinking behind Tulsa Project Theatre's musical cabaret *Broadway Your Way*, currently running at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, is ingenious in its simplicity yet potentially fraught with danger. The idea of allowing the audience to vote online for the songs they want to hear is a clever way of marketing the production and engaging the target audience. The danger arises in trying to create a cohesive show around the random songs selected. While some Broadway tunes have become stand-alone classics, many don't translate as well when removed from the context of the show and the character who sang them. To this production's credit it manages to negotiate this difficulty pretty successfully, creating a show that is fun, charming and pacy with some standout moments.

*Broadway Your Way* is not a musical, it's a musical cabaret and the distinction is important. As such it is less a concept album and more of a greatest hits compilation. The first selection, after the Invocations and Instructions, is a tightly paced medley of Broadway themed favourites including Lullaby of Broadway and Broadway Baby. This is followed by a selection of individual numbers, with the first act concluding with an extended Sondheim medley cleverly constructed around Sondheim's, It's The Little Things You Do Together. Here we find several Sondheim numbers woven together to paint an intricate and engaging picture of love and desire and the loss of that love and desire. If the balance of the first act was slightly more successful, the second act included an intriguing piano solo, some excellent individual numbers and, in Rodgers and Hammerstein in under 10 minutes, what proved to be the most memorable and hilarious medley of the night.

While there is certainly a case to be made for staging this production in a smaller, more cabaret friendly venue than the John H. Williams Theatre, the difficulty here would be the confining nature of a smaller space and accommodating the fairly large and enthusiastic audience who were present. Director Machele Dill exploited to full benefit the openness of the stage on the night, using every inch to full capacity and never letting the focus or energy become static. In opting for a format of themed medley arrangements contrasted with some stand-alone numbers, Dill made some astute choices, working as she was with material handed to her by an audience vote, and managed to keep proceedings moving at a lively, but never hurried, pace. JC Laucks platformed

set design, with costumes and props draped strategically about the stage, included a band inconspicuously tucked away to the rear. However, the backdrop of an illuminated screen upon which colours shifted didn't always match the energy generated on stage. Lighting did not have its finest hour, showing unpardonable basic mistakes on a couple of occasions, such as performers waiting interminably long periods before being lit. It can only be hoped that this was the result of first night jitters. However, musical direction by Jim Gregory was top notch with transitions between numbers and segments seamlessly handled.

*Broadway Your Way* is all about celebrating the musical and, as with any production of this nature, some moments are going to stand out over others. And there are some standout moments including Christian Elser and casts rendition of *The King of Broadway*, Liz Masters, spectacularly attired as Norma Desmond, singing *As If We Never Said Goodbye*, Machele Dills nakedly honest rendition of *The Stars and Moon* and Jonathan Gilland's moving rendition of *Close Every Door*. Claire Kifer and Jenna Tamisea were consistently excellent throughout and Kyle A. Dougan showed a comic timing to rival Donald O'Connor during the shows standout medley, *Rodgers and Hammerstein* in under 10 minutes, which featured an onstage stop watch to show there were no tricks being played.

*Broadway Your Way* may not be the most risky or innovative musical revue you're ever likely to see. But it was never intended to be. Rather it was intended to give Tulsa's musical theatre aficionados a chance to indulge their preferred musical tastes. As such it's something of a guilty pleasure and, like all guilty pleasures, best enjoyed by just giving yourself up to it.

*Broadway Your Way* runs at the John. H. Williams Theatre, Tulsa Performing Arts Centre.

July 29th and July 30th at 8.00 pm, and 2.00 pm on July 31st



**Chris O'Rourke**  
Tulsa Theater Examiner

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