

Mac-Haydn Theatre, Chatham, NY

The Full Monty, Book by Terrence McNally, Music and Lyrics by David Yazbek;
Choreography by Elizabeth McGuire. Directed by Todd Underwood.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“You Rule My World”

Every once in a while a show comes along that lives on its own individual merits, its special concept and nothing else. “The Full Monty” is that sort of show. It doesn’t have hit songs or a TV comic lead, or a major star from the movies or even the theater to carry it. It lives on its own without these things. The production now on stage at the Mac-Haydn Theatre in Chatham,



Aidan Brennan, Gabe Belyeu, Dean Marino,
Kylan Ross, Xander James; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

New York is that kind of show. You won’t come out humming the ballad, crooning the love song or imitating the intricate dance steps. You will leave the theater feeling good, feeling grateful that you aren’t out of work or dealing with a messy divorce and difficult child support. The people you leave behind on the stage may have to handle all of that but all you have to do is enjoy their trials and tribulations from your comfy seat. Lucky you!

Six men who’ve been out of work for a long time come together to devise a plan for quick money-making in order to save their lives and save their souls while they’re at it. They’ll outdo the male strippers of a touring Chippendales group. The men, with no real leadership and very little experience work through their difficulties and get their show together so that they can

take care of their wives, whose own lives are centered on keeping their relationships fed. It always amuses me that the money the men expect to make so that they can be the providers again will come from the wives buying tickets to see them strip and dance. That is irony at its finest.



Monica M. Wemitt; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

They enlist the help of a semi-retired female pianist with a professional background, played here by the glamorous Monica M. Wemitt who lifts the play out of its dramatic doldrums and into the world of comedy

at its best. Wemitt is a professional who delivers funny lines with humor and sings her big solo number, “Jeanette’s Showbiz Number” with delightful energy and a tongue-in-cheek delivery that stops the show cold.

The men she holds in thrall include Dave, played with sensitivity by Dean Marino (Dave’s wife is beautifully portrayed by Julia Hajjar), “Horse,” an aging Black Man with hip trouble, sweetly played by Tezz Yancey who can definitely dance, Malcolm (Kylan Ross) and Ethan (Andrew Burton Kelley) whose new friendship blossoms beautifully, Harold (Gabe Belyeu, who can seemingly play anything well), and Jerry (Xander James) who masterminds the idea of an all male strip-dance group and then finds it difficult to psychologically handle. James delivers an excellent and moving performance as does Marino. One other male, Aidan Brennan on opening night, plays Jerry’s son Nathan. Brennan gave a fine, moving performance.



Dean Marino, Julia Hajjar;
Photo: Ann Kielbasa

The whole resident company has been transformed in this production into the working class of Buffalo, New York and they completely pass inspection. Some of their fine singing voices have been altered for this score into the harsher, more shrill sounds of the very bourgeoisie. It all adds to the flavor of environment they are recreating on the stage. This is also shown in the choreography devised by Elizabeth McGuire who seems very comfortable with the very commonplace characters she has worked with here. Director Todd Underwood has also kept the traditional tenderness of musical comedy out of the proceedings, and both have delivered a very realistic picture of these people. Angela Carstensen’s costumes are right in line with the production’s poignant position and Andrew Gmoser’s lighting is ideal for this show.



Xander James; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

“The Full Monty” refers to baring it all publicly and bare it they do. Still, it’s a very clean, if lengthy show running almost three hours. This is fun and yet dramatically accurate. It is a family-friendly show with a few ideas and words that mothers may not approve of but they are natural and work well in this show. However, I do recommend this play at the Mac, and hope that loads of people get to see it in its three week run, the longest of their daring season.

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The Full Monty runs at the Mac-Haydn Theatre, 1925 Route 203, Chatham, NY through September 6. For information and tickets call 518-392-9292 or go to their website at www.machaydntheatre.org