

Ghent Playhouse, Ghent, NY

Buyer and Cellar by Jonathan Tolins. Directed by Cathy Lee-Visscher.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“For a Meeskite she did pretty well.”

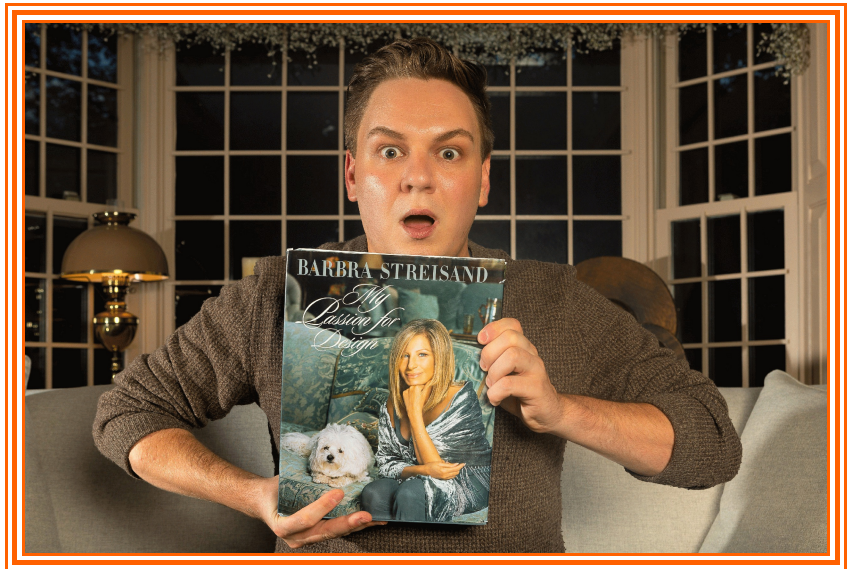
This story never happened. The author, through the mouth of his character Alex More, tells us that up front. It’s a fiction, a lie, a movie script that never got made. That’s what Alex tells us before he relives the whole thing from start to finish and crushes us with laughter as we witness his re-creation of the job/relationship that has formed him and transformed his life. Before he has finished telling us his “made-up” story we are caught in its reality, feel his pain and his joy and suffer with his loss. This is the tale of a gay man in Hollywood who goes to work in Barbra Streisand’s Malibu home, in her basement which she has made into a New England commercial street, a place that devastates and elates Alex well outside the bounds of reality.



Sam Reilly as Alex More; Photo: John Shea

Or did it happen? We may never be sure, but on stage Sam Reilly, playing Alex, makes it as real as it can be. The ninety minute mono-dramedy is touching, is funny, is emotionally riveting. It’s an exhausting, rambunctious adventure with stardom and its fleeting, tremulous, unstable humanity very clearly explains the human condition when it comes to exposure to a world that is technically unavailable to the common man, to Alex, to us all.

What makes this play so very attractive is that very thing: that its story is one we'd all like to live in, but we can't. Many of us would like to be Alex, to experience what he does as he forges a perceived new friendship and professional relationship with a mega-superstar. For others the desire would be to enjoy a friendship with Alex as he lives his story in front of us. Those two aspects of the story attract us and when things turn on him we can be glad that we have the chance to take a big step backward away from the inherent tragedy of the assumption that things can be better for us through it all. That is the key element in Reilly's performance - he brings us close to it all and then allows us to back up and watch him adjust to his new, new reality.



Sam Reilly; Photo: John Shea

On a beautiful set designed by director Cathy Lee-Visscher Reilly delivers nicely in this role. Coached, and presumably egged on, by Lee-Visscher, he works the consequential inconsequential to its limits. This story, he has told us, never happened but we wonder if that is a face-saving footnote to the reality of the encounter. We view our understanding of what it is to be this star and find ourselves wondering how a young man whose hair color could command a designer's concept of throw pillows would act and react to the new, corrupt world around him.

"Buyer and Cellar" is not just a funny, one-man play, it is an examination of psyche - his and ours as well. There's never been anything quite like it.

+ 10/09/2022 +

Buyer and Cellar plays at the Ghent Playhouse, 6 Town Hall Place, Ghent, NY through October 23. For information and tickets go to their website at www.GhentPlayhouse.org.

