

The Sharon Playhouse, Sharon CT

Something Rotten! Book by Karey Kirkpatrick and John O'Farrell.

Music and Lyrics by Karey Kirkpatrick and Wayne Kirkpatrick.

Directed by Amy Griffin. Choreographed by Justin Boccitto.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

"It's a Musical, a Musical."

It's actually the musical *of* musicals. Nick and Nigel Bottom want to capture some of the success of their former novice actor William Shakespeare who has become the "rockstar" of late 16th century London. The Bottom brothers haven't had a hit show in a long while and it has become discouraging, especially as young Nigel has become a fan of Will's. Nick desperately goes to a seer, Donna Nostradamus, niece of the more famous soothsayer, for advice and she tells him to create a musical, something no one has yet heard of back in Shakespeare's day. Her advice song turns into a fabulous production number and the race is on to create something vital and new. The song is not just good advice, it's a hilarious take on the American musical-comedy and if you haven't already been laughing hysterically, you will when you hear this song. In fact if you don't enjoy yourself at this presentation of "Something Rotten," I'll personally apologize. I don't expect I'll have to; The Sharon Playhouse production is sheer joy!



Jen Cody and Company sing "A Musical"; Photo: Aly Morrissey

"Welcome to the Renaissance" sings a minstrel (and chorus) played really well by Tyler Miranda. He later leads the cast in the grand finale of the show "Welcome to America," the true home of the Musical, of course. But this isn't his story; it primarily concerns the Bottom family, Nick, Nigel and Nick's wife Bea. She's a very modern woman who longs to be taken seriously as a woman who is the equal of a man. (Clearly this period play takes on contemporary issues so there really is something for everyone here.) Younger brother Nigel, a talented poet but a dreamer falls in love with Puritan Portia whose father leads the religious right against the theater and song not related to the New Testament. Nigel and Portia's love affair has to combat and overcome lots of issues that drag us into the present day trials of Donald Trump and his compatriots. Though the show predated Trump's political career (it opened on Broadway in 2015) it certainly, in the voice of Brother Jeremiah, humorously played by Daniel Pivovar, reflects what came in 2017, the year the show closed, and later.



Max Crum, Emily Esposito, Michael Sanora; Photo: Aly Morrissey

Obsessive Nick Bottom is played by Michael Santora, his wife Bea by Emily Esposito and his brother Nigel by Max Crumm. They are all just terrific in their roles, a perfect match of talents. They are among the shining lights in this company of 25 players, plus eight musicians including music director Jacob Carll who leads a fine assemblage of musicians. Nigel's (Crumm) beloved Portia is played by Melissa

Goldberg who transports the ideals of youth and devotion to new realms of delight.

Shakespeare himself is a transport of a different sort and as played by Danny Drewes is also a transport of sexual humor and rock star behavior. The character is so self-absorbed and cynically self-centered that it is a surprise to see him communicating with others at all. The old fables about Will S. and his "inspirations" are used throughout this show as his sources of inspiration are marched out to music we could almost believe he wrote for himself. Drewes gives a grand and grandiose performance as The Bard (It's Hard to Be the Bard).



Danny Drewes (center); Photo: Aly Morrissey

Emma Simon is a beautiful Lady Clapham, Nick's sponsor, who walks out on his first attempt at a musical about the Black Death (yes, it's funny!) and Ryan Palmer adds great humor to the role of Shylock, a Jewish theater fan who is willing to take her place in spite of the ban on Jewish participation in the Arts. Palmer makes an especially good Jew. I don't ordinarily cite the chorus but this group of fourteen players do exceptional work particularly with the demanding choreography provided by Justin Boccitto (a former Berkshire Theatre Critics Award winner) whose work, as usual here, is absolutely marvelous.

The biggest surprise is Jen Cody as Nostradamus, a role usually played by a man (Brad Oscar originated it). She has a pure sense of humor and timing and she creates a female variation that is so very memorable it will be difficult in future productions to not think of her and miss her. A great voice, fantastic comic timing, and a good dancer as well, she almost steals the show away from the Bottom brothers.

Amy Griffin has done a perfect job with this show. I was not familiar with her work but I hope to see more of it. She has been aided by a team of designers who do yeoman work on this show: Costume Designer Kathleen DeAngelis, Scenic Designer TJ Greenway, Lighting Designer Alix Lewis, Wig Designer Kurt Alger, and Sound Designer Darryl Bornstein.



Jen Cody as Donna Nostradamus; Photo: Aly Morrissey

To be succinct, or is it too late for that, this is a grand production of what has become one of my favorite shows of the 21st century. If I could I'd see it again; I can't, but you, you lucky reader, you can. And should.

+ 06/25/2023 +

Something Rotten! plays at the Sharon Playhouse, 49 Amenia Road, Sharon, CT through July 9. For information and tickets go to www.sharonplayhouse.org or call 860-364-7469.