

Goodspeed Musicals, East Haddam, CT

The 12, Book and Lyrics by Robert Schenkkan, Music and Lyrics by Neil Berg.

Directed by John Doyle.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“We were ordinary.”

Goodspeed Musicals is presenting John Doyle’s heavy-handed direction of a new musical about the apostles, Jews in hiding, after the crucifixion of their leader and teacher, Jesus. Robert Schenkkan’s book never names him; we are expected to *understand* who is being talked and sung about by this mostly Black cast, and who these men are in the story. It is a big assumption. We are in an abandoned warehouse containing an unused, inverted crucifix; the set has been designed by John Doyle himself. The men are dressed in twentieth century clothing, looking like homeless, penniless indigents; so is the Mary Magdalene figure known as Mags; she also carries a knapsack. There are twenty-three musical numbers with dialogue and action holding them together in a unity that sometimes seemed questionable.



The cast of Goodspeed's THE 12. Photo: Diane Sobolewski.

The best aspect of this show is its music: modern, lyrical, almost moving emotionally. The show abounds with sound, people sing at the drop of a hat, sometimes without provocation and always with purpose. Berg has set the Jewish traditional prayer, The Mourner’s Kaddish, quite beautifully, but like the rest of the show this most emotional prayer that ordinarily sets me to tears, left me cold and unmoved. I cannot determine exactly why, but perhaps it is because at the point in the show where it was sung I wasn’t prepared for it. Mother Mary’s lullaby to her infant son was beautifully performed by Rema Webb and it completely took me in with its very



Wesley Taylor as Doubting Thomas:
Photo: Diane Sobolewski

coming near the end of the play. In fact the entire company, including the sequestered orchestra, gave incredible performances. Musical Director Adam Souza deserves much praise for his work with his six piece band and with the company of singer/actors - two of whom add their guitars.

expressive tone of understanding the future fate of her newborn child.

Likewise, Tom's song "Give Up" had some impact on me at the time, though I couldn't recall a single note of it by the end of the show.

Mel Johnson was effective as Tee (or Thaddeus) whose dream of the fates of his fellow apostles is a chilling moment in the show



Rema Webb as Mother May;
Photo: Diane Sobolewski



Adrienne Walker as Mags;
Photo: Diane Sobolewski

A standout in this show is Adrienne Walker as Mags, the character based on Mary Magdaleine. Constantly reviled by the others and ignored whenever possible, she brings back the news of the teacher's tomb being empty and the guard-stone of its entrance having been moved away. Her news is not accepted with any joy or pleasure and her song, "Empty," while a fine piece of writing, is an annoyance to the assembled men. When it is declared by Tee that her fate is to be written out of the history of the teacher and his disciples there is a shudder of delight in the on-stage crowd.

Costumes by Ann Hould-Ward are remarkably worthwhile in this concept. They are shabby, cheap and overtly wintery in a historic Jerusalem that doesn't suffer bad winter weather like lower east side Manhattan where this show visually is set in Doyle's peculiar design. Japhy Weidman's lighting design is a visual highlight of this show almost accomplishing what the show itself does not, moving the audience. Jay Hilton's sound design work is excellent.

The rest of the cast includes Wonza Johnson as

Andrew, Rob Morrison as Bart (or Bartholomew), Kelvin Moon Loh as James, Etai Benson as Jimmy (or James the Less), Kyle Scatliffe as John, F, Michael Haynie as Matt (or Matthew), Akron Lanier Watson as Pete (or Simon Peter), Brandon J. Ellis as Phil (or Phillip), and Gregory Treco as Simon. They all do perfect work in their roles, but it is the show that lets them down.

I went to this musical expecting nothing but came away with respect for the authors taking risks galore and the actors falling in behind them risking reputations and building followers. That the work is flawed is certainly not their faults. It is the “creative” sensibility of the director that has failed the concept here.



Rema Webb, Wesley Taylor; Photo: Diane Sobolewski

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The 12 plays at Goodspeed Musicals, at the Goodspeed Opera House, 6 Main Street, East Haddam, Ct through October 29. For information and tickets go to www.goodspeed.org or call 860-873-8668.

