

Berkshire Theatre Group, Stockbridge, MA

*Pipe Dream*, Book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on the novel “Sweet Thursday” by John Steinbeck; Music by Richard Rodgers.  
Directed by Kat Yen. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

*“What a day it’s been for dreaming”*

Rodgers & Hammerstein had only written one failed musical (Me and Juliet) when they took on the adaptation of John Steinbeck’s “Sweet Thursday” which used characters from his very successful book, “Cannery Row” about the occupants of a small town in Monterey, California. The program was literally a pipe dream of a project; a pipe dream is an unrealistic hope or fantasy derived from the illusions experienced by opium-pipe smokers. This project was just such an experience, one Richard Rodgers disliked intensely.



The company Finale of Pipe Dream; Photo: Caelan Canough

The song-writing team replaced Frank Loesser who was writing “The Most Happy Fella” at that time and they also replaced Feuer and Martin as producers, investing their own money in

what would become their most famous failure. It contains some excellent songs including “The Man I Used to Be,” “Suzy is a Good Thing,” “All at Once You Love Her,” “Everybody Has a Home But Me,” and “The Next Time It Happens.” It was nominated for nine 1956 Tony Awards and won only one for Costume Designer Alvin Colt. It starred Metropolitan Opera Wagnerian soprano Helen Traubel as Fauna, a cathouse madam, William Johnson as Doc, a scientist, and Judy Tyler as Suzy, a streetwalker. Tyler was best known as Princess Summerfall Winterspring on the Howdy Doody TV show. She and Johnson both died within a few years of this show’s closing.



Joe Joseph, Nora Luz Barenblatt; Photo: : Caelan Canough

The show has problems. The central love story doesn’t even begin for 2/3 of the first act, The Pipe of the title doesn’t appear until more than halfway through the second act. Steinbeck was reportedly happy with Hammerstein’s work, but they had no relationship. Director Harold Clurman was no Joshua Logan who had made a hit of “South Pacific.” It ran for only 246 performances.

The current production at Berkshire Theatre Group’s Unicorn Theatre in Stockbridge in many ways exceeds the original. There are ten Equity members in the cast, all of them excellent singers and a small orchestra of six musicians. I missed the Robert Russell Bennett orchestrations which filled the theater with music. Johnson’s role of Doc was played by Joe Joseph in a satisfactory manner. Tyler’s role, Suzy was taken by understudy Hanna Koczela who gave an excellent performance of the reticent, anti-social young woman. Fauna. Traubel’s role, was played by Sharone Sayegh, who sang very well, and acted wonderfully, although she seemed too young for the part.

All of the secondary roles were in excellent hands with this cast. Elijah Dawson’s Hazel was terrific. Wes D’Alelio was a very good Pancho. Sumi Yu and Lael Van Keuren were delicious as Agnes and Emma (reduced from the original show’s six girls). Kudos to Hennessey Winkler. Mike Celalo, Pierre Jean Gonzalez, Jackson Mettick and the rest.

Director Kat Yen has done a fine job



Joe Joseph, Sharone Sayegh;  
Photo: Caelan Canough:

putting this show on its awkward feet and working with a fairly fluid set designed by Jimmy Stubbs. His choreographer Isadora Wolfe has staged the musical numbers with wonderful period style. The costumes by Kathleen Doyle were excellent. Evan C. Anderson's lighting was superb.



Hennessey Winkler, Joe Joseph; Elijah Dawson;  
Photo: David Dashiell

This is one of those shows one cannot say enough about. It is an obscure creation by a major team, the men who created "Oklahoma!," "Carousel," "South Pacific," TV's "Cinderella," "Flower Drum Song," "The King and I," "The Sound of Music." There are rarely opportunities to see the two flops that emerged from their pens. This one has brilliant lyrics, sweet tunes, and a difficult book. It is rarely ever produced and this could be your only chance to see it. If, like me, you are a devoted musicals enthusiast, it is something you absolutely must see. You really have no choice.

+ 07/31/2024 +

**Pipe Dream** plays at the Berkshire Theatre Group's Unicorn Theatre on Route 7 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts through August 31. For information and tickets call 413-997-4444 or go to [BerkshireTheatreGroup.org](http://BerkshireTheatreGroup.org).

