

Mac-Haydn Theatre, Chatham, NY
Something Rotten, book by Karey Kirkpatrick and John D. Farrell.
Music and Lyrics by Wayne and Karey Kirkpatrick.
Directed by John Saunders. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“It’s . . .a . . .Musical!”

It is a musical, perhaps THE musical of musicals. Funny, sharp, incisive, singable, it touches all the bases. You laugh uproariously as Nick Bottom struggles to create an innovative theatrical production in the 1590s. Yes, the 1590s, Shakespeare’s time. Will S. Is a major character in “Something Rotten,” now on stage at the Mac-Haydn Theatre in Chatham, New York. This is my fifth production of this show (I missed one last year) and I would gladly see it again. Especially this edition. It is just plain wonderful.



Amber Mawande-Spytek; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

From its introductory chords that bring on Amber Mawande-Spytek as the minstrel to sing “Welcome to the Renaissance,” to the conclusion of the show the merriment in this silly story, that drives home important points in theatrical history, never stops and, whether parody or comedy, the humor and the singable songs considerably delight the audience.

The opening night brought understudies onto the stage, each of whom did remarkable jobs in their respective roles. Jake Koch, usually playing the nice Jew, named Shylock, stepped into the pivotal role of Thomas Nostradamus. Alan Hughe, normally the theater's master electrician, took over the role of Shylock. J.J. Razzano joined the ensemble as Covid took its toll.

Hughe, who has played this role in a community theater production did a fine job as the enterprising bill collector. Koch was a brilliant choice for the sooth-sayer who predicts the creation of the musical. His work was as good as the original Nostradamus on Broadway, Brad Oscar. He should keep the role, and I hope you see him do it.



Andrew Burton Kelley, Jake Koch; Photo: Ann Kielbasa



Kevin Weldon;
Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Among the smaller roles Kevin Weldon portrayed the patron of the arts, Lord Claphan, in a manner so realistic it was hard to hate him, even if you wanted to, for backing out of his deal with the Bottom brothers to support their work. Nick and Nigel write and produce plays in this Shakespearean era and can't really compete with Will S. even though Nigel is so very talented. Points are made throughout the show about Will's ego and his talent for "stealing" other people's ideas and this is a lot funnier than it sounds. It is what creates the basic story of "Something Rotten."

Nigel, sweetly played by the talented Kylan Ross, falls in love with the daughter of theater's basic enemy and ultimate nemesis, Brother Jeremiah, played with great physical humor by Tristan Caldwell. His child, Portia, played to the romantic hilt by Belle Babcock, is as effusive as Brother J, but in totally opposite directions. They make the concept of family seem as perverse as possible.

The egotistical Will Shakespeare was played as a leather-clad rock star by Xander James who truly rocked the role. His heavily stylized performance was great fun to watch and listen to and he acted the inflated ego to perfection.

Hughe's Shylock was also fun to watch and listen to, though not quite as polished as the rest of the cast. One of the show's points is that the famous playwright stole pretty much everything from Nigel's sonatas to Shylock's name and the authors have been very clear about this thesis throughout the show, even granting Will S. the use of Nick Bottom as a funny character in the still to be written "A Midsummer Night's Dream. You don't hear it, but you can feel it coming.



Xander James Tsunodo; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

The Bottoms are the tops in this show. Nick's wife Beatrice is played with style, grace and hilarious intent by Madison Stratton who makes the most of her two songs and her wonderful comic scenes as she proves herself worthy of her marriage.



Kylaln Ross, Madison Stratton, Andrew Burton Kelley;
Photo: Ann Kielbasa

This is the only show you may ever see that celebrates in song the Black Death, eggs and omelets and will power in caps. It is beautifully designed from light frames to egg costumes by the Mac's special team of fine designers including Andrew Gmoser, Bethany Marx and Emma Cummings. Mandy Modic is the choreographer and she keeps them tapping away.

This is a show I intend to see again before it completes its three week run. I had that much fun at this, my fifth production of the show, and I suspect you will also. Perhaps I'll see you there; if we bump into one another, say "Hello" or any Shakespearean greeting you can muster.

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Something Rotten plays at the Mac-Haydn Theatre, 1925 State Route 203, Chazthan, New York, through September 1. For information and tickerts go to machaydntheatre.org or call 518-392-9292.

