

Mac-Haydn Theatre, Chatham, NY

**A Grand Night for Singing**, Music and Lyrics by Rodgers & Hammerstein.

Directed by Eoghan Hartley. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

**“We have nothing to remember so far”**

Five singers are presenting an amalgam of songs by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, taken from their eleven shows written between 1943 and 1959 at the Mac-Haydn Theatre in Chatham, New York. This 1993 show was arranged by Fred Wells under the supervision of actor Walter Bobbie. The medleys are captivating and it is also wonderful to hear some of the more obscure song hits by this dynamic team of creators. Still, the show itself offers

little other than the songs themselves. We learn nothing about the time, the partnership, the stars who introduced the songs. The show is just the songs. . .and that is plenty.



The cast; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Director  
Eoghan Hartley  
and his fine  
choreographer,  
Anthony Michael

Velez keep the show moving and interesting as unexpected pairings, groupings and incredible individual moments take the stage. For example a trio downstage center sing “It’s Me” from the 1953 flop *Me and Juliet* segues into a man singing “Love, Look Away” from the 1958 hit *Flower Drum Song*. He sits upstage left alone in a single spotlight. The dramatic combination is pure show business and it works brilliantly. You can sense that these songs were actually meant to be paired this way as they tell a short story all their own.

Rodgers and Hammerstein created some of their best shows from short stories: *South Pacific* and *Flower Drum Song* and *Cinderella* among them. They prided themselves on finding the right sound for each show creating a single entity within each project. This show proves that their egotistic concept was false. The songs are all of a piece in this show. There are at least thirty-six of them in the show and they all seem to have sprung from a single musical concept.

The main thing this show delivers is an appreciation for Oscar’s lyrics. They are as fine and as straightforward as song lyrics can be, sometimes thriving on repetition and other times delivering a single thought in a multiple ways. Rodgers sets each one perfectly and that is what

makes them such perfect musical expressions.

The show lives in its stunning performances. Lyric Baritone Tristan Caldwell returns this season and delivers romance and sexual tension in his delivery of such songs as “All At Once You Love Her” and “This Nearly Was Mine.” Women all around me could not control their furtive sighs.

The three women in the show each create multiple characters in their performances, together and singly. Bridget Carrow, the slenderest of the trio, sang a beautiful “If I Loved You” and a delicious, comic “I Can’t Say No” which nearly stopped the show. Belle Babcock delivered a soft, special rendition of “It Might As Well be Spring” and Cinderella’s enduring ballad “Do I Love You Because You’re Beautiful”, a duet in the actual show. Together Bridget and Belle made us laugh with the joyous “Stepsisters’ Lament,” which as far as I am concerned could have gone on long enough to complete the entire song.



Tristan Caldwell; Photo: Ann Kielbasa



Belle Babcock, Isabella Bertoni, Bridget Carrow;  
Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Isabella Bertoni had the finest voice of the threesome and she proved it with “That’s the Way It Happens” and “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair.” Her finest moment, however, came with the only genuine hit song from *Allegro*, “The Gentleman is a Dope,” which made Lisa Kirk into a star.

They were a terrific ensemble all by themselves, although I do question some of costume designer Sam Landy’s choices for them; some were fine, others didn’t make them as attractive as they should have.

The fifth member of the company was Dramatic Tenor Logan Pavia who pleased us with “Maria,” “Love, Look Away” and a very well performed “The Surrey With the Fringe On the Top.” He was especially effective in his duets with Caldwell such as “All At Once You Love Her.” The fine blending of their voices made many songs seem much more special than they might have been as pure solos. His duets with the women in the company were also beautiful and well worth hearing.

The revue setting for this show worked well, designed by Alivia Cross and Andrew Gmoser's lighting design was nothing less than spectacular. Sean McGinley's sound design, handled by George LaChance was the finest this theatre has offered in years.

The work of choreographer Velez in combination with Hartley's direction gave us a show so easy and fluid that it seemed as though there would be no other choices in staging the show. The two made an unbeatable combination. Evelyn Tomaro led her six person orchestra perfectly.



Logan Pavia; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

I have never been a fan of this particular show but, as before, the Mac-Haydn production has converted me into an overwhelmed audience member. This is definitely a good evening of musical theater, well worth your time and money.

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**A Grand Night for Singing** continues at the Mac-Haydn Theatre, 1925 State Route 203, Chatham, NY through June 15. For information and tickets go to [www.machaydntheatre.org](http://www.machaydntheatre.org) or call 518-392-9292.