

Theatre Eddys

Wednesday, September 4, 2019

"As You Like It: A New Musical"

As You Like It: A New Musical

William Shakespeare (Book & Lyrics); The Kilbanes [Kate Kilbane & Dan Moses] & Phil Wong (Music & Lyrics); Rebecca J. Ennals (Adapter)

[San Francisco Shakespeare Festival](#)

As part of what many consider his most joyous and romantic comedy, William Shakespeare includes several songs, making the ever-popular *As You Like It* one of his most musical plays. San Francisco Shakespeare Festival has



Regina Morones & Michael Barrett Austin

taken his cue and expanded his vision by creating a world premiere *As*

Contact Information

Reviewer Eddie Reynolds can be reached at TheatreEddys@yahoo.com

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Ratings Legend:

5 E's - Loved It - A classic, would see it a second time.

4 E's - Really Liked It - Excellent, strong production.

3 E's - Liked It - Good production but something is lacking or not clicking.

2 E's - Just OK - Below average but had at least one interesting component.

1 E - Did Not Like It - Waste of time.

No rating - A work in progress (reading or workshop), or children's production.

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You Like It: A New Musical for its 2019 "Season of Free Shakespeare in the Park," calling upon San Francisco and Oakland favorites – The Kilbanes (Kate Kilbane and Dan Moses) and Phil Wong – to compose the music and add more lyrics to those the Bard already includes in his script. The resulting musical employs a mixture of folk and country/western sounds with a little '60s-style rock mixed in, all which fit wonderfully for a play that takes place largely in the magical forest of Arden where urban-made troubles are healed and sought-for-naught loves are sealed.

How can we not immediately like our story's Number One hero, Orlando (Michael Barrett Austin), as we meet him as a pleasantly smiling, casually dressed busker on the street, singing in an attractive twang with a touch of Texas in it, "Second Son." It is a song where he honors the memory of his father whose kind legacy he means to carry on as he declares, "Gotta make my own way."



Michael Barrett Austin

His good-nature, down-home demeanor is in big contrast to his older brother, Oliver (Rondrell McCormick), who struts into the scene with a villainous air, berating his younger brother for his street singing while himself donned in gaudy, bright blue clothing and black leather. Oliver then plots to have the court wrestler of the current, equally detestable Duke Frederick (a viperous Dave Sikula) kill Orlando in a court-sponsored wrestling match later that day. A wonderfully outlandish Le Beau (Gwen Loeb) with blue eyelashes two-inches long, feathered hair, and an outfit wildly splattered in color sings in a deep and punchy voice "The Ballad of Charles the Wrestler." She croons to introduce the hilarious wrestling/boxing match, with our hero, Orlando, of course winning over the fetish-attired-in-leather Charles (a deliciously cocky and confident Annika Bergman).

Because Orlando is the son of an enemy of the evil Duke, match-winner Orlando is banished from the court, but not before he and Rosalind –



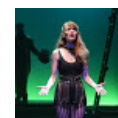
Regina Morones & Anne Yumi Kobori



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Nabucco Giuseppe Verdi, Composer Temistocle Solera, Librettist West Bay

daughter of the also banished older brother of the Duke (a kindly, free-spirited Duke Senior whom we will later meet, also played by Dave Sikula) – have met eyes and fallen immediately in love. Rosalind has been tolerated at court because she is like a sister to Frederick’s daughter, Celia; but when she declares defiantly to her uncle that if Orlando goes, she goes, the Duke banishes her only to see his daughter prefer to follow Rosalind than remain with her ego-centered, dark-hearted father. In a folksy duet of close-placed harmony, Celia (Anne Yumi Kobori) and Rosalind (Regina Morones) sing “I’ll Go Along with Thee,” joined by Orlando and his faithful, elderly servant, Adam (Norman Gee) as all four sing on their way to Arden Woods, “Out in the trees, we will be free.”

But as any Shakespeare fan knows, now the story becomes a true comedy in full Bard fashion. Rosalind decides its time to disguise as a man



Michael Barrett Austin, Regina Morones & Anne Yumi Kobori

(Ganymede) and Celia as a poor woman (Aliena) so that she can follow Orlando without his knowing and learn if he really does love her or not. Orlando becomes a love-sick puppy, writing awful but syrupy-sweet, love poetry to his Rosalind and polluting the forest by hanging them on every tree he can find. Ganymede becomes Orlando’s love counselor, even offering to be a stand-in for Rosalind so that Orlando can practice wooing him (her). Together, they sing one of the show’s best songs, “Carry My Love to Me” with its strong-pounded beats revealing two hearts full of love but currently disguised. They follow with a cute ditty, “The Madness of Love,” reflecting their own mad way of forest courtship.

Their circuitous search for fulfilled love in the forest is not the only pairing in the making. Shakespeare populates the woods with would-be pairs galore. In the case of country shepherds Phebe and Silvius, the bespeckled Phebe can only see hearts for the pretty youth she met, Ganymede (who is actually Rosalind, of course), totally ignoring the gaga looks and love pining of Silvius. Annika Bergman (who was earlier the beefed-up Charles the Wrestler) is a total giggle as Phebe, the epitome of awkward moves and stumbles in her love-sick state for Ganymede. Akaina Ghosh as Silvius is the kindest of hearts and the most persistent of woo-ers as he continues to pursue a woman who only insults and shuns him. Together, they sing a hilariously staged

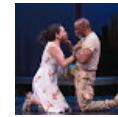
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“Phoebe’s Lament” (one of the musical’s several songs that utilizes lyrics by both Shakespeare and The Kilbanes).

A country wench with gusto running naturally through her veins named Audrey (played by Gwen Loeb, the earlier and equally funny Le Beau) sets her eyes on Touchstone, a wildly dressed wit who woos in clownish fashion by calling her a ‘slut,’ to which she retorts proudly, “I am not a slut but I thank the gods I am foul.” Touchstone becomes half of a commenting duo with Jaques who wears a skull-decorated shirt and says of his persistently melancholy nature, “I love it better than laughing.” The two have a heyday comparing the merits of court versus forest life; but as Jaques, Maryssa Wanlass knocks it out of the ballpark as she uses a wide mixture of voices and manners to describe “the ages of man” in Shakespeare’s famous “All the world’s a stage” speech.

The final love pairing is between the ever-faithful cousin, Celia – whom Anne Yumi Kobori plays with purely delightful aplomb with many non-verbal expressions that are rib-tickling – and the unlikeliest of lovers, Oliver, Orlando’s evil brother who enters the woods to kill Orlando but is cured of his bad ways by the forest’s healing powers. Rondrell McCormick (who doubles in roles as the country bumpkin with a sunny disposition, Corin) succeeds in convincing us of Oliver’s transformation, delivering with Celia the show’s best-sung number, a reprise of “I’ll Go Along with Thee” during which his powerful, beautiful, and rich voice blends with Anne Yumi Kobori’s sweet, softer one.

Like in most productions of *As You Like It*, it is Rosalind who in the end rules the day; and Regina Morones ensures that tradition is not broken in this outing. Her Rosalind from Moment One is bold and courageous, determined and delightfully devilish, hilariously dramatic with purposeful exaggeration, and animated to the point of proving the actor’s natural, comedic flair. She delivers all the fabulous lines Shakespeare awards her with ease and confidence, deploying a myriad of voice, style, and stance variations. She is a perfect yin to Orlando’s mild-mannered, more bashful yang. Together, they are a pair that we can imagine will in fact live happily ever after with much fun and laughter along the way.

Director Rebecca J. Ennals readily uses the expansive, outdoor park space to provide a forest’s depth and breadth beyond the stage of some twenty-five tall, wooden poles that Neal Ormond has created to represent the Forest of Arden. The Director ensures the five acts flow with ease as the cast comes and goes from every side as most of them play double roles with tongue-in-cheek often built into the pairings. Susan Szegda’s costumes are full of their own laugh-producing powers, employing everything from lace and leather to feathers and frills to spruce up costumes often in the loudest of hues. Max Krongaus deserves a special bow as sound designer as the fog-powered winds at the Parade Grounds of the Presidio became a major challenge to the

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show's sound system the entire afternoon. Finally, Music Director Brendan Getzell has assembled eight musicians – with some actors also playing everything from piano to accordion to ukulele – whose music not only accompanies the show's fifteen songs and reprises but also often serves as a background, musical score to the shenanigans on stage.

This traveling troubadour of actors, musicians, and singers is in the final month and last two, San Francisco venues of a summer's journey of shows in parks that earlier included Pleasanton, Cupertino, and Redwood City. All shows are free; and judging from the Labor Day opening crowd at the Presidio, they are finding their packed and grateful audiences.

This new musical version of *As You Like It* is overall enjoyable, largely due to a cast that knows how to deliver Shakespeare's prose and verse with great skill and style. The music is pleasant throughout, although the non-Shakespeare lyrics at times do not match the Bard's cleverness nor add enough always to the story's flow to warrant inclusion. But at the same time, music does seem a natural inclusion to this story of comic romance; and kudos is well deserved to the Company for giving the Bay Area this summertime gift of a new look at an old friend.

Rating: 4 E

As You Like It continues at the Presidio Main Parade Ground Saturday and Sunday, September 7 and 8, 2 p.m. before moving to its last venue of the season, McLaren Park, Jerry Garcia Amphitheatre, various times and days September 14 – 22. All performances are free and require no tickets. Check the website www.shshakes.org or call (415) 558-0888 for more information on exact times and dates.

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Posted by [GuyDads](#) at 10:35 AM

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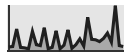
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