

BWW Review: MASQUERADE: THE MUSIC OF ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER at White Plains Performing Arts Center

A new musical review by Peter Danish Oct. 12, 2021



"Masquerade" at the WPPAC has more great songs in it than any show currently on Broadway - by far.

That said, any review of the music of Andrew Lloyd Webber, (for readers who have been on Mars for the last half century: "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," "Jesus Christ Superstar," "Song and Dance," "Aspects of Love", "Evita," "The Phantom of the Opera," "Sunset Boulevard," and "School of Rock") must struggle with the dilemma of not what to include - but rather what to leave out.

"Masquerade" succeeds in touching on most of the "greatest-hits" as well as some nice "deep-cuts" as well. Over thirty numbers are performed (either in their entirety or as part of a medley), thus, if you can't find something to like in this show, frankly, you're just not listening.

The composer, appearing in voice over throughout the show, immediately informs the audience that "nothing bothers him more" than shows that present songs in a chronological order. Thus giving the creators license to leap back and forth in time and presumably present the music in a more effective dramatic order - as least I think that's why. The voice over bits act as the glue connecting the various sections from the different shows. In truth, the script of the VO is probably the weakest part of the evening (he warns the audience you don't like musical theater you should "please leave now, but please do it quietly"). I won't share any of the anecdotes so as to avoid any spoilers, however, Kevan Loney's projected graphic visualizations that accompany the little spoken bits are wonderful; extremely clever and they keep the visual aspects of the show consistently interesting.

But let's face it - NOBODY came to hear Lord Andrew's little ruminations. The songs are the stars and they are performed by a myriad of first-rate voices.

Pound for pound, Andrew Lloyd Webber has written more great musical theater songs than any other composer in the last half century (sorry Sondheim fans - get over it.) And Masquerade does an superb job of presenting them in fresh new orchestrations by Musical Director Stephen Ferri. Re-creating, re-imagining, and re-arranging songs that are so well-known and beloved is a herculean endeavor, but Maestro Ferri was up to the task, delivering lush, often ravishing sonic creations to accompany his cast.



Speaking of the cast...

In a word, it was wonderful. First rate voices from top to bottom, a cast of eight deftly handled the almost ridiculously expansive breadth of musical styles covered in the show. Beginning with the title number from "Jesus Christ Superstar", it was clear the cast was not merely a collection of soloists, but a groups of pros perfectly capable of handling all the harmonic chores of the choral parts. Cartreze Tucker kicked off the evening with a delightfully energetic take on Judas. Following in succession by Emily Royer's Mary Magdalen in "Everything's Alright," and a powerful "Gethsemane" from Aaron Richard Burt.

Similar groupings of songs from Webber's most popular shows followed. Five numbers from "Evita" were a particular highlight, capped by a touching "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" by Rebecca Kuznick.

There are simply too many great numbers to discuss every individual tune, but there were several standouts, including a "mash-up" of three songs from three different shows, called the "Love Medley" that easily could have been individual highlights. "Love Changes Everything" (Aspects of Love), "I Don't Know How to Love Him" (Superstar) and "An Unexpected Song" (Song and Dance) were presented in solo, then cleverly woven together into an interesting and powerful combination.



A host of numbers from "Cats" concluded the first act, highlighted by a heart-breaking rendition of the evergreen chestnut, "Memory," by Brandi Burkhardt.

Act Two began with an entr'acte of melodies from "Starlight Express", followed by a choral version of the title number of the show "Masquerade" from "Phantom of the Opera". Keeping with the Phantom theme, Julian R. Decker delivered a wonderfully impassioned "Til I Hear You Sing" from the Phantom's sequel: "Love Never Dies."

Although she may be a bit young to be the chronologically ideal choice for Norma Desmond, Brandi Burkhardt gave a strong argument for some producer to create a new production of "Sunset Boulevard" with her as the star. Andrew Foote was a swaggering Joe Gillis delivering a sensational take on the title number from the show. Bookending Mr. Foote's number, Ms. Burkhardt sang the two big numbers from "Sunset Boulevard" with heart-rending poignance and almost pitiful grace. Kudos to director Antoinette DiPietropolo for her especially touching treatment of these moments.

The numbers from "Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat" were charming and well-done, but suffered a bit from having to follow the depth and pathos of the "Sunset Boulevard" set.

Shannon Rakow's bright, full-voiced Christine shined in the collection of songs from "Phantom of the Opera" that concluded the show. She and Julian R. Decker were a powerful combination as the Phantom and Christine, with Rakow exhibiting some truly gleaming high notes.

Decker's robust, full-blooded "Music of the Night" put a fitting capstone on a delightful evening.



The highlight of most musical theater shows is the "eleven-o'clock" number. But this show literally had eleven "eleven-o'clock" numbers. While that many "big numbers" can be a bit overwhelming at times - it is always entertaining - *very very entertaining!*

How To Get Tickets

Masquerade: The Music of Andrew Lloyd Weber runs thu, Oct 14 - Sun, Oct 24

White Plains Performing Arts Center

11 City Place White Plains NY 10601

Box Office: 914-328-1600 www.wppac.com