

IN REVIEW

Singin' in the Rain pours on the entertainment

By BARRY PLETCH
Special to The Guardian

Etobicoke Musical Productions' theatrical version of the classic 1952 MGM film, *Singin' In The Rain*, is absolutely breath-taking and provides theatregoers with "a glorious feeling" of nonstop entertainment including real rain.

All too often, other theatre companies attempt to mimic the movie step by step and fall short. The trio of Alexander Galant (artistic director), Kieren MacMillan (musical director) and Michelle Mitchell (choreographer) recreate one of the greatest movie musicals of all time with an exhilarating fresh approach. It is great to witness creativity, innovation and attention to detail while remaining true to the original adaptation of the screenplay by Betty Comden and Adolph Green.

The story of *Singin' in the Rain* occurs during the Roaring '20s around the movie studio Monumental Pictures in Hollywood. Eye-candy silent screen actors enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle of adoring fans, wild parties and swimming pools based entirely on their looks and not on their talent. Just as the "moving picture" industry impacted the live theatre and vaudeville

acts, the silent film industry was about to embark on its own upheaval and challenges with the invention of talking films. *The Jazz Singer* was the first "talkie" and it was an instant success in 1927. Soon every cinema house began installing sound equipment and the movie studios were scrambling to very quickly adapt. Production houses even employed vocal coaches and provided diction lessons for their attractive actors. Some of these actors were able to make the transition while others failed miserably as their voices and acting ability did not match their dashing and debonair good looks. *Singin' in the Rain* light-heartedly tells the classic tale of boy meets girl while humourously satirizing this panic-stricken golden era of Hollywood.

Alexander Galant succeeds in establishing the setting by paying homage to Hollywood with a film tribute during the Overture. That's right - a film. Galant is an accomplished short film director and showcases his remarkable talent through numerous film sequences during this entire theatre production. He invested more than 300 hours shooting the sequences on digital video, editing, and rendering the footage through the use of special software to create the look of actual 1920s film.

J.P. Baldwin has the undaunted task to recreate the role of Don Lockwood, silent movie sensation, made famous by Gene Kelly. Baldwin is a recent graduate of Sheridan Music Theatre and makes us quickly forget about that "Gene guy" through his own dynamic dancing, strong acting and fantastic singing especially during the legendary title song sequence.

Patty Sullivan plays Kathy Seldon, the young, enthusiastic stage actress who is initially not impressed by Don's stardom on the silent screen. Sullivan warms the audience with her angelic rendition of 'You Are My Lucky Star' and together with Baldwin creates the essential love story during 'You Were Meant For Me'. Sullivan's veteran stage and small screen savvy is pivotal for the success of the timing for the live recording of 'Would You?' that is performed to perfection.

Veteran actor, D. Kirk Teeple, has superb comedic timing, which is essential for the role of Cosmo Brown, Don Lockwood's trusted sidekick. He provides comedic relief through one-liners and wows the audience through his acrobatic anthem in 'Make 'Em Laugh' which is cleverly executed as to not mimic the film. It is a real

treat watching Baldwin and Teeple team up for two thrilling tap numbers 'Fit as a Fiddle' and 'Moses Supposes'. Baldwin, Teeple and Sullivan are a triumvirate of true triple threat talent as they complement each other quite nicely throughout the upbeat number 'Good Morning'.

Lina Lamont, played exceptionally well by Carmen Gillespie, is the epitome of the volatile, narcissistic Hollywood silent screen star. With the invention of sound in cinema, Lina's career and the future of Monumental Pictures are depending on her voice to match her beauty. The trouble is that whenever Lina opens her mouth it is nothing but an ear-piercing shrill laced with a thick New York accent. Listening to fingers down a chalkboard would be better. Lina also truly believes the false stories in the fan magazines that she and Don will soon be married and will do anything to break up the romance between Don and

Kathy. This character role is very tricky to balance in order to not go "over the top" and Gillespie's performance is perfectly hilarious. We love Lina and hate her at the same time. Gillespie's ability to continue the character during her solo 'What's Wrong With Me?' is a true crowd-pleaser.

Tamara Stokes-Said as Zelda Zanders, Lina Lamont's gal pal, compliments the stage with Gillespie during a scene in Lina's dressing room. Jerome Madden, John Mencarelli, Kevin Dunne, Susan Ambrose, Thom Speck, Ted Ambrose, Sharilyn Vandermolen and Mike Scott all provide memorable supporting performances dedicated to "make us laugh".

From start to finish *Singin' in the Rain* is filled with life, love and lots of laughs. Show dates are May 2, 3, 4, 9 and 10 at the Burnhamthorpe Auditorium, 500 The East Mall. Tickets are \$21 for adult; \$15 for youth. Call 416-248-0410 for tickets.

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