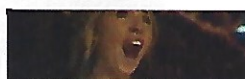


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My Disappointment with "The Prom" Movie's Casting

Review: "The Bridges of Madison County" at SOPAC

June 30, 2019



• Sarah Gordin, Contributing Critic - New Jersey

The Bridges of Madison County captured the audience's attention the moment young Francesca (Brigitte Francis) danced her way onto the stage. The musical is a beautiful love story about a woman from Naples who flees Italy with an American. She and Bud, her husband, live in Iowa on a farm with a son and daughter. However, this musical is not as

much a story about that but is a love story between Francesca and a handsome stranger who shows up on her front door and the complications that ensue.

Jun 25, 2019

Francesca, played by Jennifer Ellis, was incredible. Her high soprano soared up to the balcony on every song. Even when Francesca was doing something questionable within the show, I never disliked her, which is a testament to how Ellis was able to make you feel Francesca's emotions. Robert Kincaid, played by Bryant Martin, had a strong singing voice along with excellent chemistry with Ellis. Francesca's family played by Jared Bradshaw as Bud Johnson, Alex Carr as Michael and Courtney Martin as Carolyn were standouts in the show and provided contrasts to Francesca's and Robert's relationship. True audience favorites were Tait Ruppert as Charlie and Deborah Tranelli as Marge, an older married couple who provided comic relief. Tranelli also showed off her vocals on the song, "Get Closer," revealing a sultry tone. There were only a few times that the whole cast, including an off-stage chorus, sang together but when that did happen, I had instant chills and wished that Jason Robert Brown had written more full choral numbers for this show. However, The Bridges of Madison County is purely Francesca's story, and the directing by Merete Muentner showcases this.

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The story unravels, again and again, letting us into the past, as the songs with detailed backstory are sung and then back into the "present" the story continues. The musical was never in the present but lived in snapshots of the past. The projections created by Douglas Macur captured this feeling for me as one image was projected onto the screen and then faded into the next, creating nice pacing. I left the theatre feeling that our lives are made up of pictures with a story that is untold. However, audiences were given the gift of seeing Francesca's snapshots and finding out the full story behind them. As Francesca says, "I want to believe we are the first to know this feeling," and I certainly felt like I was experiencing everything right there with her.

The Bridges of Madison County

The Bridges of Madison County closes on June 30th at South Orange Performing Arts Center (SOPAC). The cast features Jennifer Ellis (Francesca Johnson), Bryant Martin (Robert Kincaid), Jared Bradshaw (Bud Johnson), Tait Ruppert (Charlie), Deborah Tranelli (Marge), Alex Carr (Michael), Courtney Martin (Carolyn), Jodie Ann Evans (Marian/Chiara). The production includes Direction/Choreography by Merete Muentner, Music Direction by W. Brent Sawyer, Set Design by Bethanie Wampol, Lighting/Productions Design by Douglas Macur, Costume Design by Janell Berte, Props Design by Alexis Krayniak.



-  Christopher Peterson  Comment
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