



theatrical musings in Minnesota and beyond

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Monday, January 28, 2019

"A Little Night Music" by Theater Latte Da at the Ritz Theater



Theater Latte Da's production of *A Little Night Music* is pure loveliness from the moment the cast steps onstage behind a sheer curtain, warming their voices and waltzing in old fashioned undergarments, to when that same curtain falls at the completion of the story and the youngest cast member steps out gazing in wonder. As everything created by Peter Rothestein and company, it's thoughtful, detailed, well cast, beautifully staged, and musically gorgeous. Sondheim's 1973 Tony-winning musical is a charming, smart, and funny story about the perils of love and the phases of life, bringing to mind the Shakespeare quote "Lord, what fools these mortals be." And you'd be a fool to miss it.

Set in Sweden at the turn of the last century, the multi-Tony-winning musical *A Little Night Music* is a story about love, loss, regret, and second chances. Desiree is a glamorous actress who has left her teenage daughter to be raised by her mother in the country. Her former lover Fredrik walks back into her life after seeing her in a performance and wants to rekindle their relationship. But there's a complication. Well, several complications. Fredrik has a new young wife Anne, who has so far refused to consummate the marriage. And his son Henrik is in love with her. Desiree has a married lover, who's very jealous and possessive of both his wife and mistress. When the entire group is invited out to Desiree's mother's house in the country, much hijinks ensue, as you can imagine. Lovers meet and break up, hearts are broken and repaired, and everyone has a lovely, if bittersweet, time. This is a comedy, almost a farce, but one with an undercurrent of sadness, longing, regret, and weariness of life.*

This ten-person cast is smaller than usual; there is no separate quintet, the Greek chorus of singers. Instead that role is filled by various other characters or cast members doubling, making this a smaller more intimate affair. The quintet role seems mostly to fall to the servants Frid and Petra, characters who don't normally sing a lot - a very smart choice when they're played by Bradley Greenwald and Britta Ollmann, both of whom have gorgeous voices (and Britta is also featured on a great fun song "The Miller's Son").

The whole cast really is an embarrassment of riches, talented performers all, both individually and as an ensemble. Everybody's

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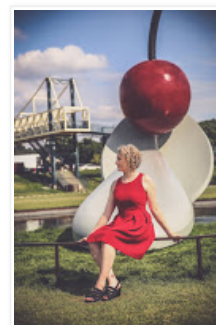


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favorite Sally Wingert is a wonderful Desiree - smart, funny, spirited, wistful. She's well matched in Mark Benninghofen's Fredrik. Although neither are trained singers, having worked more in straight plays throughout their illustrious #TCTheater careers, they do well with the material (including the musical's most well known song "Send in the Clowns") and bring such emotion and truthfulness to their performances.



Desiree and Fredrik (Sally Wingert and Mark Benninghofen)
(photo by Dan Norman)

This talented ensemble also includes Grace Chermak, with a lovely voice and youthfulness as Fredrik's young wife Anne; Riley McNutt as his adorably forlorn and lovesick son Henrik; Rodolfo Nieto as Desiree's lover, the stern and demanding count; Elizabeth Hawkinson as his neglected wife who puts the plan in motion to get her husband back; Susan Hofflander as Desiree's wise and endlessly quotable mother; and last but not least, the young and charming Mabel Weismann as Desiree's daughter.



waltzing behind the curtain (photo by Dan Norman)

Sondheim wrote the entire score in 3/4 time, waltzes and a bunch of other words I don't know like mazurka (see the wonderfully detailed dramaturgical information in the program). It's not necessarily something you would notice, but it gives the music a unique and dreamy feel. The score is beautifully realized with a chamber music sound by the five-person onstage

orchestra, led by Jason Hansen on piano, who also music directed Theater Mu's production a few years ago (and is the [Twin Cities Theater Blogger's favorite music director of 2018](#)). And of course, where there is waltz music, there is waltzing, in the form of Heidi Spesard-Noble's lovely and subtle choreography.

The whole show has a feeling of nostalgia, heightened by the sepia toned set and costumes. All of the characters are dressed in beautiful gowns or suits in shades ranging from ivory to dusty beige, until the final dinner scene when the men appear in formal black, and the women in rich jewel tones, which really pop after one's eyes have adjusted to the neutral shades. The play takes place in multiple



Fredrika and Anne (Mabel Weisman and Grace Chermak)
(photo by Dan Norman)

locations, achieved by simple period set pieces in those same sepia tones, and our imaginations. The first act takes place in front of a sheer curtain hiding the onstage band. When we arrive at the country in Act II, that curtain drops, revealing not only the band but trunks of birch trees and soft greenery, accompanied by a warmer, sunnier light. (Costume design by Rich Hamson, scenic design by Joel Sass, lighting design by Marcus Dilliard - the [Twin Cities Theater Blogger's favorite lighting designer of 2018](#).)

Upcoming Shows

- [She Loves Me](#) (Artistry at Bloomington Center for the Arts)
- [The Wolves](#) (Jungle at the Southern, Mpls)
- [Ordway Cabaret: A Brand New Day Part One - Breaking Barriers](#) (Ordway, St. Paul)
- [Hair](#) (Theatre 55 at Mixed Blood, Mpls)
- [The Devout](#) (TLA at Illusion, Mpls)
- [My Beautiful Infinity](#) (Chameleon at Bloomington Center for the Arts)
- [Isaac's Eye](#) (Pro Rata at Gremlin, St. Paul)
- [The History of Religion](#) (free reading at Playwrights' Center, Mpls)
- [Flowers for the Room](#) (Yellow Tree, Osseo)
- [Antigone](#) (Park Square, St. Paul)
- [The Skin of Our Teeth](#) (Girl Friday at Park Square, St. Paul)
- [Stewardess!](#) (History Theatre, St. Paul)
- [Til Death](#) (Bucket Brigade at Art House North)
- [Benevolence](#) (Penumbra, St. Paul)
- [Sense and Sensibility](#) (Lyric Arts, Anoka)
- [Falsettos](#) (Broadway tour at Ordway, St. Paul)
- [Actually](#) (MJTC, St. Paul)
- [Love Comics](#) (MMT at Bryant-Lake Bowl, Mpls)
- [Line of Sight](#) (Uprising at Off-Leash, Mpls)
- [Into the Woods](#) (Ten Thousand Things, various locations)
- [As You Like It](#) (Guthrie, Mpls)
- [Iphigenia and Other Daughters](#) (Unbound at Gremlin, St. Paul)
- [My Antonia](#) (Illusion, Mpls)

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A *Little Night Music* is one of the best musicals from one of our best living composers, brought to life by one of #TCTheater's best interpreters of music-theater. Continuing through March 3 at the Ritz Theater in Northeast Minneapolis.



the sepia toned cast of *A Little Night Music* (photo by Dan Norman)

*Plot summary borrowed from what I wrote about TheaterMu's production a few years ago.



Labels: *A Little Night Music*, Bradley Greenwald, Britta Ollmann, Grace Chermak, Liz Hawkinson, Mabel Weismann, Mark Benninghofen, Riley McNutt, Rodolfo Nieto, Sally Wingert, Susan Hofflander, Theater Latte Da

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