

A BENEVOLENT BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying at *The Shedd*

In the canon of musical comedies, it doesn't get much better than *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.

Playing this weekend at The Shedd, this hilarious 1961 musical slyly satirizes the midcentury corporate American workplace, as its hero, J. Pierrepont Finch, a humble window washer, ascends the rungs of the corporate ladder by not really *doing* anything.

With music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, this Broadway hit features a collection of truly great songs, from goofy send-ups of business culture to romantic, lilting odes. The show is chockfull of defining moments in American theater.

Dylan Stasack as Finch has some big shoes to fill, embodying a role defined on stage and screen by the inimitable Robert Morse. Morse's Finch had the geeky, everyman charm that made us root for him, and though Stasack approaches the part with more bravado, he still sells Finch with all his might. Stasack's strong voice and charming demeanor give the production an unwavering energy and enthusiasm.

Stephanie Hawkins is lovely as Finch's wistful but pragmatic love interest, Rosemary. Kaitlyn Sage shines as Rosemary's best friend Smitty, and Ron Daum delights as a



DYLAN STASACK AND
STEPHANIE HAWKINS IN
*HOW TO SUCCEED IN
BUSINESS WITHOUT
REALLY TRYING*

blustery boss man J.B. Biggley.

Mark Huisenga's set design is the most fully realized we've seen on a Shedd stage. Hats off to designer Cosmo Cole for whatever he's done to improve the theater's acoustics, as every note was resonant and clear. Clever costumes by Jamie Parker root the story in the early '60s, and Caitlin Christopher's choreography offers a splash of zaniness in every number.

Director Peg Major plays it for laughs. Not every

character is as developed as it could be, and the scene work in the second act could have been faster paced, but who cares? Working with such great material, Major consistently delivers the comedic essentials.

Conductor Robert Ashens leads a tight 15-piece orchestra. There's just no substitute for live music, and this band sounds great. — *Rachael Carnes*

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying plays 7:30 pm Friday and Saturday, June 26-27, and 2 pm Sunday, June 28, at The Shedd; for tickets, visit theshedd.org, or call 434-7000.

THE ALGEBRA OF LOVE AND LOSS

Cottage Theatre finds the perfect formula in David Auburn's *Proof*

First, the bad news: Cottage Theatre's excellent production of David Auburn's Pulitzer-winning drama *Proof* ends its run this weekend, so you'll have to scramble to get tickets.

The good news, then, is that, should you land seats, you will be treated to one of the finest local productions of the year. Directed with a sure hand by Alan Beck and featuring a small cast of talented local actors, this production achieves an almost perfect balance of emotional resonance and technical finesse. The play is so engaging and moving, so rich and dynamic, it feels like a dream.

Proof tells the story of Catherine (Nicole Trobaugh), the 25-year-old daughter of Robert (Patrick Torelle), a mathematical genius, recently deceased, whose early promise was scuttled by serious mental illness. Having cared for her father at the expense of her own promising career in math, Catherine now wallows in depression and isolation.

Catherine's solitude is broken by the arrival of her father's former grad students, Hal (Kory Weimer), who scour the notes Robert left behind, in search of nuggets of genius. Further complicating matters is the arrival of her sister, Claire (Janet Whitlow), a high achiever who wants to haul her moping sister back to New York, where she can start a new life.

Set solely in the backyard of the family's Chicago home, the play jumps back and forth in time, establishing at once the ravages of Robert's insanity as well as the legacy of his tragic career on the surviving characters. Issues of genius and insanity, trust and love, self and world — the stuff of life — are complexly dealt with, though never at the expense of authentic human drama. *Proof* is a gritty, flesh-and-blood story that grapples big themes — it is at once ethereal and hyper-real.

What really makes this particular production great, however, are the performances, which are pitched one to the other like tuning forks, so expertly do they reveal the messy tangles of fate and human connection. Every actor here shines, but the star belongs to Trobaugh, whose portrayal of Catherine captures the heartbreak of a brilliant woman struggling — desperately, hopefully — to break free of her own demons. — *Rick Levin*

Proof plays through June 28 at Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove; tickets at cottage theatre.org or 942-8001.

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