

LEAGUE OF CINCINNATI THEATRES

STRENGTHENING, NURTURING, AND PROMOTING CINCINNATI THEATER

Covedale Rings in Seldom Produced “Meet Me In St. Louis”

Saturday, February 15, 2020

Review by Nathan Top of “Meet Me in St. Louis”: [Covedale Theatre](#)

Based on the 1944 film starring Judy Garland, “Meet Me In St. Louis” is a time capsule of a show, with the book by Hugh Wheeler and a score built out of the classic American songbook by Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane. Set in the frictionless world of St. Louis, Missouri in 1903, the story revolves around the lives of the Smith family, focusing on second oldest daughter Esther and her will-they-won't-they relationship with the charming boy-next-door, John Truitt. Each member of the Smith family has their own sitcom-esque storylines as the show breezes through the year leading up to the 1904 World's Fair.

Director and choreographer Dee Anne Bryll brings this nostalgically vibrant world to life, with several fast-paced and sometimes appropriately goofy choreography (specifically for “Under the Bamboo Tree”). The period costumes designed by Caren Brady are not only attractive to see but also build the world of 1904 as a vibrant yet sophisticated time. The skeleton framework set of the Smith home was cleverly designed by Brett Bowling and not only allows the audience to see through the world of the show but also view the pit musicians upstage. During the Act One finale “The Trolley Song,” a large trolley rolls on stage and spins around, creating a particularly enthralling visual effect. Music director Ryan Henrich has created a clean show sound with both the cast and the pit. The exposed trumpet solo during the dancebreak of “A Touch of the Irish” was a highlight of the show.

Since the main plot is a near obstacle-less courtship between two high school steadies, there is potential for the show to stall or drag through several parts of the show. Fortunately, the magnetic cast grabs the audience's attention from the opening. The leading lady Esther, played by sultry-voiced Sydney Kline, begins the show with the simple and beautiful ballad “The Boy Next Door.” Kline continues to delight the audience with her other features, including an extended solo on “The Trolley Song” and the classic “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas.”

Starring opposite Kline is the handsome Matthew Gretz, who plays Esther's love interest John Truitt. Their chemistry is palpable and fills the courtship scenes and drives the story to the inevitable conclusion. Talia Zoll and John Langley play the matriarch and patriarch of the Smith household, Anna and Alonso, who compassionately capture the meaningful challenge of raising five strong-willed children, each coming of age in their own right. Zoll gives a bewitching performance on the song “You'll Hear A Bell,” which rings as the emotional heart of the show.

Brianna Bernard and Dylan McGill, playing young lovers Rose Smith and Warren Sheffield, awkwardly continue on their own courtship while Angela Alexander Nalley as Katie and Joe Hornbaker as Grandpa Prophater interject throughout the show with well-timed comedic punches. You won't want to miss this seldom produced show. “Meet Me In St. Louis” runs now through March 8th. Tickets can be purchased [here](#).