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# Theater: "An Evening With Patti **Lupone and Mandy Patinkin**"

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### AN EVENING WITH PATTI LUPONE AND MANDY PATINKIN \*\*\* ETHEL BARRYMORE THEATRE

Two current Broadway shows offer the pleasure of major talents in concert. Hugh Jackman: Back On Broadway has received all the accolades and it's great fun. Everyone would enjoy it but I might send tourists to Jackman first and the serious theater buffs to Lupone and Patinkin. It's a modest affair, geared to being performed easily and simply all over the country in any sort of space, which the two of them have apparently been doing for years. But it offers the distinct pleasure of two pros doing what they do best in the company of one another.

The stage is scattered with stands topped by bulbs and

on the side are pianist Paul Ford and bassist John Beal (both in sterling support). Front and center are Lupone and Patinkin, working their way effortlessly through "Another Hundred People" and they're off. It's not strictly a concert and it's not a lazy love-fest or walk through their greatest hits.

The heart of the show are three sections of singing and acting built around three musicals: South Pacific, Merrily We Roll Along and Carousel. In this setting, it's quite easy to accept Nellie as an older, single gal serving as a nurse in the war and their chemistry is palpable as they dive in and out of dialogue and songs like "A Cockeyed Optimist" and "Some Enchanted Evening." Even better is Merrily and the marvelous finale built around Carousel.





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In between we get numerous other tunes, with Patinkin reprising his Follies success "The God-Why-Don't-You-Love-Me Blues" and Lupone delivering a more measured "Everything's Coming Up Roses." They delight in numerous comic numbers like "Baby It's Cold Outside" and the novelty tune "April In Fairbanks" (unfamiliar to me, it's from New Faces Of 1956). This sort of thing can be tossed together in a minute but they've crafted it with care. Patinkin subtly and graciously showcases Lupone throughout, giving himself goofier turns a la "I Won't Dance."

Of course they tackle Evita, done in a smartly straightforward manner. He puts his arm around her and talks about how they met on that show and became fast friends. Patinkin then turns out a fiery, focused "Oh What A Circus" while she sits on the side and applauds. They switch and he admires Lupone as she acts her way through "Don't Cry For Me Argentina." As with several other points in the show, the audience is raptly quiet when these two command the stage. Almost as an aside, Lupone delivers a nicely modulated, moving "In Buddy's Eyes" shortly thereafter.

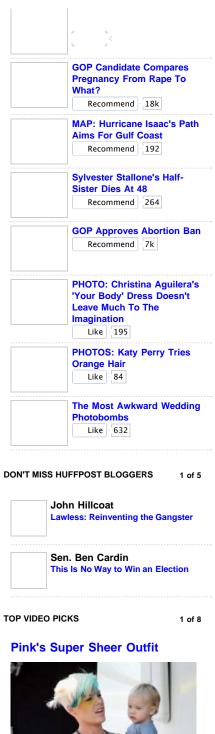
But the finale really is Carousel, in which these two people known so well for their distinctive, careermaking voices remind us what exceptional actors they are. Patinkin is a would-be menacing Billy Bigelow who can't faze a more world-weary Julie Jordan, as embodied so nicely here by Lupone. Yes, they're playing kids but the emotions of warily reaching out to another are universal and timeless and for a scene or two, it works wonderfully.

"If I Loved You" and "You're A Queer One, Julie Jordan" are gems delivered beautifully, but I remember the emotions they evoke so deftly in the acting moments. Lupone tears up on a dime during Merrily and here her character's instant ability to see into Billy's awkward, confused heart is quite moving. And Patinkin delivers the commencement address from the finale of that show; it's advice to students and indeed anyone trying to live their life with purpose and dignity. He captures that moment so simply and directly and touchingly, it breaks your heart. It's the greatness of Rodgers & Hammerstein in a nutshell: a disarming truhfulness that slips past your defenses with ease. Corny in the hands of amateurs; moving in the hands of pros.

Lupone's trumpet of a voice is more muted now; Patinkin's swoops and moans and various voices from deep bass to high falsetto as familiar as ever. Acquired tastes? Of course, but we've been acquiring that taste for years. They don't break new ground or work wonders during this low-key, charming evening. They simply get on stage and perform. It's all they've ever wanted.

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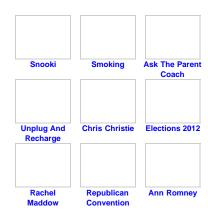
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**Note**: Michael Giltz was provided with free tickets to this show with the understanding that he would be writing a review.

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