

THEATER REVIEW:

'Tintypes': A Cheer For the Melting Pot

The New York Times

July 17, 1988, Sunday, Late City Final Edition

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Section: Section 12LI; Page 19, Column 1; Long Island Weekly Desk

Length: 631 words

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THE United States may be getting battered in the daily headlines, out at Studio Theater the bruised flag is being proudly honored in a rousing revival of "Tintypes." In this intimate musical by Mary Kyte, Mel Marvin and Gary Pearle, we are once again infused with the spirit of adventure of the great wave of immigration that took place around the turn of the century. If these immigrants arrived in New York and discovered that the streets were not paved with gold, they merely shrugged and determined to do some repaving.

In "Tintypes," a multitude of scenes creates a photo album effect of immigrant life in the late 1800's and early 1900's. To a pastiche of familiar tunes, such as "Yankee Doodle Dandy," "Meet Me in St. Louis," "The Wabash Cannonball," "Wait for the Wagon" and "America," the show takes a whirl through moments of history as diverse as the invention of the light bulb, the Spanish-American War, the building of the Panama Canal and the glory days of vaudeville.

Teddy Roosevelt blusters across the stage, pushing, poking and shouting the country toward greater expansion and production. Behind his shouts of encouragement are the waves of immigrant garment workers, steelworkers, merchants and dreamers seeking liberty and pursuing happiness. As one character explains, all he wants is a home with a closed door "to open and shut like the czar in his palace." They don't always get what they want, but their striving is respectfully remembered in "Tintypes."

This production has been directed with a lighthearted touch by Domenick Danza, who keeps everything on an upbeat note without ignoring the darker side of the immigrant experience, such as poverty and discrimination. He is working with a cast perfectly suited to their roles by virtue of their first-rate singing voices and high degree of stage energy. Each member of this five-person cast is called on to represent thousands of immigrants. No small feat, but each handles his part with confidence.

Notable in the cast is Lorraine Ferro, a bright, pretty, perky actress. Ms. Ferro, who appears to focus her entire attention on each of the characters she plays, no matter how small the part, excels as the fiery Emma Goldman. Christopher Springer brings a charming, slightly insolent manner to the variety of young men he portrays. Frank DeMonaco strives to be every inch the loving, cuddly teddy bear, which makes his Theodore Roosevelt especially endearing. Elisa Dragotto is a graceful woman who lends dignity to all of her immigrants, notably the Ziegfeld star Anna Held. Virginia DeSimone was the only member of the cast to appear stiff on opening night, but she compensated by her clear and lovely rendition of the song "Nobody."

The musical director, Bill Holland, does an outstanding job with his snappy piano accompaniment, backed up only by a violin and a set of drums.

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The one unfortunate aspect of this otherwise outstanding production is Ralph Madero's lighting design. As set designer, Mr. Madero efficiently uses a number of boxes that serve as everything from prop containers to park benches to speakers' podiums. However, he undercuts his own set design by a lighting design that makes no sense whatsoever. Too often the actors are left in the dark and the scene changes are highlighted. An attempt to light portions of the show to look like silent moving pictures only serves to keep the action from being seen.

In all, however, Studio Theater's "Tintypes" is a top example of the type of small-scale musical this theater does so well. And, its unabashed, simple patriotism is just the sort of tuneful summer fun needed to counteract the effects of grimmer current events.

"Tintypes" will continue through Aug. 6 at the Studio Theater in Lindenhurst.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); THEATER (78%); FACTORY WORKERS (70%); GARMENT WORKERS (50%)

Industry: ACTORS & ACTRESSES (78%); ROAD & BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION (75%); FACTORY WORKERS (70%); APPAREL MFG (65%); GARMENT WORKERS (50%)

Geographic: NEW YORK, USA (78%); UNITED STATES (93%); PANAMA (79%)