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It is always exciting to find a new company making its first production a musical. Paradox Theatre Company just opened its first musical “The Fantasticks” (one of my favorites) in its home at The Community House of Winnetka. First of all, let me tell you what a surprise this venue was. I loved everything about it except the other activities going on tonight could have destroyed the well directed production that we were watching.

For those of you who have not heard of this musical, where have you been? This is the longest running Off-Broadway Musical, inspired by an Edmond Rostand play “Les Romantiques” and written by Tom Jones (words) and Harvey Schmidt back in their college days. In reality Tom Jones came in for the second round of making this show what it has become.

The story is a simple one. Two widowed fathers, raising their children decide that they will match the boy and girl. However, if they tell them this, they will rebel, because children will do the opposite of what they are advised. So they plot and plan and we get to watch the story unfold with some delightful music as well. Directed by Craig Gustafson, this small cast, for the most part , is ideal. The two fathers, Bellomy (the girl’s) is played to perfection by Terrence Sherrill and Hucklebee (the boy’s) by an equally strong Gary DeVar. For the most part they are the comic characters.

The girl, Luisa is played by Mary Rose, who has a dynamite vocal range and is adorable to watch. Her only problem is the Chicago “A” (if she gets rid of that sound, she is the ideal actress for this role). The boy, Matt is deftly handled by Austin Curtiss, who recently came home from the Navy (thank you for your service) and is back on the boards already, doing a great job. Both Mary Rose and Curtis do well with their songs, “Soon It’s Going To Rain” “Metaphor” and “They Were You”. I also felt that she “hit it on the mark” with “Much More”. Many of you might recognize these songs from a Streisand album years ago.

The story works because we have a Narrator (this character leads us from start to end) called El Gallo (this role is played by Andrew Pond) who does songs such as “Try To Remember” and “Beyond That Road” as well as “Round and Round”. He also is the person hired to do the “abduction” so that the boy and girl can get together and remove the wall that is between their houses. I have seen Pond do many comic roles over the years and while there are a few places where his wit and charm work, he lacks the spirit

of the El Gallo character in the serious scenes. I applaud him for the effort, but he is more of a character actor than a leading man.

There are three other performers in this play .First there is Stephanie Herman as the Mute. This character is almost always on the stage and is very involved, but never speaks (thus the name, "The Mute). Often this role is played by a comic white faced character and I am glad to see a company use a female in this role. Why not? The second is the Old Actor, Henry (well played by Tom Ochocinski, who uses every tool in his kit to grab the audience). He is very important to the "abduction" scene along with his novice, Mortimer (Ryan Bond, who is wonderful dyeing on stage). These gentlemen prove that there is no such thing as a small part as they shine every minute on stage.

NOTE: those of you who know the play and the songs contained within know that the abduction was called a "Rape" in the original and the song "Depends On What You Pay" was called "The Rape Song". I imagine this is our new world and makes this more family friendly. They did a fine job of changing the lyrics.

The choreography by Emily Brooks was adorable and the lighting and sound (Rob Woolson) and spotlight operation (Matthew Bonaccorso) right on target. The props (Terrence Sherrill, Jane Allyson and Gillian Madsen worked and the two musicians Nick Kabat (keyboard) and Michael Maganuco (harp) who are on the stage were a delight. The costumes were adorable (the fathers) and fitting.

This is a very short run thru September 4th with performances:

Thursdays:8:00pm

Fridays:8:00pm

Saturdays:8:00pm

Sundays:2:00pm

Price: \$25-\$38

Alan Bresloff @ around the town Chicago