

Despite Uncouth Crowd, Cliché-ridden Play, I Love You, You're Perfect Soldiers On With Charm | FrontRow

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January 18, 2011

Love is indeed a many-splendored thing, it can take the form of a well-crafted sonnet, a torrid romance novel, a cheesy sitcom, a Shakespearean tragedy, or in this case, a cabaret style musical revue like Theatre Too's perennially crowd-pleasing, made-for-date-night rendition of *I Love You, You're Perfect Now Change*.

Joe DiPietro and Jimmy Roberts' saccharine creation is the second-longest running Off Broadway musical, and it makes its ninth return back to the area. The sold out opening night is a testament to its still broad and popular appeal. Director Terry Dobson's handling of the play is by the book, and, frankly, this production could probably run on its own given how many times the majority of the cast have performed it.

In *I Love You*, four actors play interchangeable characters following a semi-chronological sequence of love vignettes, from awkward first dates, reluctant but inevitable marriage, the trials of childrearing, bitter divorce (inevitable again), to seniors trolling for love at funerals.

Yes, it is cliché-ridden and full of well-trodden "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus" tropes (guys like football, and women like to shop). However, the play falls all over itself to charm you with its humorous takes on relationships, the mundane, and satisfyingly light and cute musical numbers.

Carrie Slaughter-Whittlesey (recently a delight in Contemporary Theatre of Dallas' *Barefoot in the Park*) is Woman #1. The charismatic and lithe Ms. Whittlesey who has acted in over 700 performances of this play sparkles with her expressive eyes and impressive singing chops. Her poignant take on "The Very First Dating Video of Rose Ritz" is one of the non-musical highlights of the show.

Bradley Campbell as Man #2 projects the effortless comfort of a teddy bear with his soothing radio-like speaking voice, and his easy chemistry with the dependable Lisa Jae Miller (Woman #2) as his predominant counterpart. Their interaction in "Funerals Are For Dating" is a sweet duet for the aged.

Jeff Kinman, the newcomer to the cast, performs admirably as Man #1. There are a few minor hitches, but one senses that he will grow into the role given time. A bright spot was his transformative turn in "A Stud and A Babe." It is a testament to the professionalism and experience of his cast mates though that his presence is not out of place in this strong ensemble.

The play presents no intellectual challenge for its audience, nor does it break any new theatrical ground, but in all fairness to its simple heart, it does not set out to do so. It's an airy popcorn musical, comforting, easy, and well done for what it is. The capacity crowd appeared delighted and titillated if a bit untutored in theater etiquette. There was rampant talking (not whispering) during action onstage, taking pictures with cell phones, clinking and dropping of bottles etc. All who were involved in putting on the show withstood any of these distractions, even weathering a short power outage with good-natured aplomb.

Love soldiers on.

Photo: (From left) : Jeff Kinman, Lisa Jae Miller, Bradley Campbell, Carrie Slaughter-

Whittlesey (Credit: Ken Birdsell for Theatre Two)