

Sailors' Spree

by Amy Krivohlavek

On the Town reviewed April 16, 2005

Some came by taxi or subway, others on foot. Some walked by themselves, while others were carried in by groggy-looking parents and grandparents. But whatever their transportation, most of the audience that attended Inside Broadway's Saturday-morning performance of *On the Town* giggled with delight at a show pared down to match their own unique attention spans, found in the highly active but highly distracted minds of children.



This 50-minute production is the perfect Saturday-morning treat for young audiences. With bright colors, high-energy performances, simplified dialogue, and charming characters, the show is an ideal way to introduce youngsters to theatergoing as an interactive experience between performer and audience, compared with the more passive experience of watching TV.

Inside Broadway facilitates this process before the production begins, providing each young patron with a playbill "Study Buddy." This colorful publication features a word find, a crossword puzzle, trivia, and facts about New York and the events surrounding the show, as well as a "Critics Corner" inviting children to write their own reviews.

The show centers on three sailor friends—Gabey, Ozzie, and Chip—who tackle New York with all of their energy at 6 a.m. the morning their daylong shore leave begins. When Gabey falls in love with a photo of Miss Turnstiles posted on the subway, the men decide to split up to find her and plan to meet back in Times Square at 11 that night. Each of the sailors encounters his own adventures along the way, and the action progresses through many of New York's famous (and not-so-famous) locations.

The original version of *On the Town*, which premiered in 1944, tried to encapsulate 24 hours in a three-hour musical, and here we have even less time. Seasoned theatergoers, beware: songs have been cut and shortened, and the quick transitions may leave you wanting more depth to the scenes. The show moves at a frantic pace that matches

ON THE TOWN

Lucille Lortel Theatre

Category: Children's Theater
Written by: music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Betty Comden & Adolph Green
Directed by: unknown
Produced by: Inside Broadway
Opened: April 9, 2005
Closed: May 7, 2005
Running Time: 50 minutes

Theater: Lucille Lortel Theatre
Address: 121 Christopher Street
New York, NY 10014

BOX OFFICE

Tickets: \$15.00
none

CREDITS

Creative Team
Written by: Leonard Bernstein (music), Betty Comden, and Adolph Green (book & lyrics), based on an idea by Jerome Robbins
Directed by: Brett Smock
Produced by: Inside Broadway; Michael Presser, Executive Director

the sailors' quest to find women with whom to spend the evening. But, after all, things do happen quickly in New York.



Even in the full-length musical, Betty Comden and Adolph Green's book was a simple one, and *On the Town* ultimately became a showcase for Leonard Bernstein's music and Jerome Robbins's choreography. The music and dancing shine through here as well. Director Brett Smock's choreography is extremely sharp, with some brilliant tap sequences, most

notably during Chip and Hildy's whirlwind sightseeing tour through New York. My only complaint is that the choreography at times gets in the way of the lyrics—tricky steps in "New York, New York" left the sailors gasping for breath.

Music director Corinne Aquilina keeps things simple with keyboard accompaniment, and the music comes off beautifully, even without a full-scale orchestra.

This production is designed to tour New York's public schools from April through June, and the show appears very polished and ready to travel. Smock keeps his actors focused and moving, while Jen Price's simple yet efficient set consists of five "cityscape" pieces through which the characters run for some tricky chase sequences. David M. Henderson's costumes are also notable, with crisp lines and colors that quickly capture and complement the characters' personalities.

If the characters at times seem cartoonish and oversimplified, the actors make up for it with pluck and energy. All seven offer strong performances, but the standouts are Brendt Reil as Gabey and Meegan Midkiff as Hildy. Reil offers a wonderful Gene Kelly-esque song-and-dance turn on "Lucky to Be Me" and a powerful rendition of "Lonely Town," while Midkiff's high-energy "I Can Cook, Too" all but steals the show.

Much has been made of the importance of taking children to see Broadway shows, and I can think of no better introduction than this condensed version of *On the Town*. The young girl sitting next to me learned much about theater from her grandmother's narration ("Do you see the piano player coming out? That means the show is about to begin!"), and when the lights went down I glanced over to see her eyes grow wide in anticipation. Do your young acquaintances a favor and bring them to see *On the Town*, a welcome Saturday-morning alternative to the usual cartoons.

Sound Designer: Tara Nachtigall
Set Designer: Jen Price
Costume Designer: David M. Henderson
Choreographer: Brett Smock
Musical Direction: Corinne Aquilina
Company Manager: Nicholas M. Sala

Cast

Gretchen Burghart as Madame Dilly
Freddie Kimmel as Chip
Meegan Midkiff as Hildy
Shannon O'Bryan as Ivy
Brendt Reil as Gabey
Elizabeth Stanley as Claire
Jason Veasey as Ozzie

Crew

Production Stage Manager: Patrick Lanczki
Company Manager: Nicholas M. Sala