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VILLAGER ARTS & LIFESTYLES

Broadway classics for the very young

Special 45-minute productions of legendary plays

BY KAITLEN JAY EXUM

As executive director of Inside Broadway, Michael Presser has regularly faced the challenge of how to introduce children to theatre. The goal of Inside Broadway is to expose children to the great Broadway classics. It does so by creating kid-friendly, easily understandable shows, portable enough to travel to schools, and brief enough to not require intermissions.

By working within these confines, Inside Broadway has produced a bite-size version of the classic musical "On The Town," the tale of three sailors determined to see New York—and find dates—in their one day of shore leave. At a fast 45 minutes, the recent production at the Lucille Lortel Theater on Christopher Street sprinted through the story, focusing on only major plot points, but squeezing in a non-stop parade of songs and dance numbers. The result is colorful and frenetic, guaranteed to keep kids' attention riveted to the stage. The show which is now touring several public schools will come to PS 142 on Wed., June 1 for two shows - 9 am and 10:30 am. The 6th and 7th grades there have been working with Inside Broadway on several theater projects this year.

The performers' enthusiasm was palpable; jokes were broad, smiles big, and costumes appropriately outlandish. The camaraderie between the three main characters, sailors Gabey, Ozzie, and Chip, was obvious and natural—perhaps due, in part, to the actors' being real-life roommates. Elizabeth Stanley as Claire and Jason Veasey as Ozzie, made for a particularly endearing couple; Veasey's effortless charm and ease on the stage contrasted nicely with Stanley's affected stuffiness. Willowy Shannon O'Bryan, who played Ivy, was a clear favorite among the boys in the audience, and Gretchen Burghart earned more than a few laughs in her role as Madame Dilly, an effusive singing teacher. In fact, the Madame Dilly character was so over the top that I wasn't entirely surprised that a little boy sitting near me mistook her for a drag queen when he piped up, "I think that's a man!"

The set, though tiny, was colorful and cute, and the do-it-yourself nature of the production was rather refreshing. (Nothing Andrew Lloyd Webber here.) I found particularly entertaining the sightseeing tour that Hildy (Meehan Midkiff) gave to Chip (Freddie Kimmel), and their progress through New York was represented by signs bearing the words of different districts such as 'Chinatown,' 'Times Square,' etc.

The amusing part, though, was that each sign was carried by a tap-dancing actor, so only the actors' legs protruded from beneath the signs. The effect was silly and charming. The production, overall, was very tap-oriented to better keep young children engaged.

And engaged they were. Everyone had a favorite part,



CAST OF INSIDE BROADWAY'S 'ON THE TOWN' At top from left: Shannon O'Bryan as Ivy, Brendt Reil as Gabey and Gretchen Burghart as Madame Dilly. Bottom row from left Elizabeth Stanley as Claire, Jason Veasey as Ozzie and Freddie Kimmel as Chip and Megan Midkiff as Hildy.

it seemed. Tanasha Flynn enjoyed Hildy's songs, which she thought were funny. Alina Robateau preferred the end of the show, when all the actors came out simultaneously and danced together. Two boys agreed that their favorite moment was the very beginning, when the three sleepy sailors woke up and began singing (with their pillows, no less). Shakara Israel was thrilled when Gabey (Brendt Reil) finally caught up with Ivy, whom he had been pursuing for the duration of the musical, but Shakara's sister, Ahdara, was even more enthusiastic, saying that her favorite part was, "the whole show."

To my eyes, however, the best part seemed to be the meet-and-greet session with cast members after the per-

formance. The entire cast stood in the lobby, fielding questions and autograph requests from many young admirers. As Ivy's singing instructor, Gretchen Burghart (who, up close, looks absolutely nothing like a man), said she often gets an unusual question from some of the boys in the audience: "Does Ivy have a boyfriend?" Even if the meet-and-greet session results in a few disappointed young suitors, both the kids and the actors seem to enjoy themselves. "The kids are the best," said Jason Veasey who plays Ozzie.

Inside Broadway's next production will be Rogers and Hammerstein's Cinderella in December. Call 212.245.0710 for more details.