

Cast, design elements make 'Hairspray' a hit

By David Steinberg / Journal Staff Writer on Sun, May 29, 2011



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Like

Ninety-nine percent of the locally produced musicals I see, it's a case of one and done. Meaning that after the final curtain falls, I'm thinking of the next show.

Not so with the Albuquerque Little Theatre production of "Hairspray." It's in that one percent category, and that means it was so good I would see it again.

The production has multiple artistic qualities going for it — as it should. But what is significant here was the convergence of superior artistic qualities.

For example, it seemed that every time a soloist or the ensemble would sing, it was a moment of joyful surprise.

Jessica Fisher as the lead character of Tracy, the plus-sized, anti-hero high schooler, showed off a captivating singing voice in the opening number "Good Morning Baltimore," and in the dreamy "I Can Hear the Bells."

Mandy Farmer as Amber Von Tussle, the spoiled, self-absorbed girl we love to hate, and Juanita Evans as Motormouth Maybelle, the all-embracing record store owner, shone in their solos.

The members of the large ensemble were singing and dancing dynamos. They filled the stage on many songs and then spilled out into the audience for the finale "You Can't Stop the Beat."

Jonathan Ragsdale as Link, the hypotenuse of a love triangle with Tracy and Amber, was a limber, handsome Elvislike personality.

Jonte Culpepper as Seaweed was memorable as the athletic lead singer/dancer in "Run and Tell That."

Robert Johnson, as Tracy's delightfully rubber-faced mom Edna, and Art Tedesco as Tracy's goofy dad Wilbur were over-the-top comic wonders; their characters' humor and warm mutual feelings came through in the love song "You're Timeless to Me."

Tracy's best friend Penny (Stevie Nichols) underwent a social transformation from nerd to nice kid thanks to her infatuation with Seaweed.

Set in Baltimore, Md., the musical's underlying story is about the country in the 1960s moving hesitatingly toward racial integration. As an agent for social change, Tracy, who is white, endorses black music for the local teen dance TV show. By successfully doing so, she shifts from outsider to hero.

The design elements were critical to the success of the musical. Erin K. Moots' costume designs were period-perfect in terms of style and boldness of colors. Colby Martin Landers' set design made efficient and effective use of the compact stage.

Larry Aguilar worked his magic in choreographing many dance styles. Hats off to director Henry Avery.

If you go

"Hairspray"

WHEN: 2 p.m. today, 8 p.m. Thursday, June 2, Friday, June 3, Saturday, June 4, and 2 p.m. June 5.

Repeats June 10-12.

WHERE: Albuquerque Little Theatre, 224 San Pasquale SW

HOW MUCH: \$24 general public, \$20 seniors, \$18 students, \$10 children. Group discounts for 10 or more.

Tickets are available in advance at the ALT box office, by calling 242-4750 or by visiting

www.albuquerquelittletheatre.org

-- Email the reporter at dsteinberg@abqjournal.com. Call the reporter at 505-823-3925

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