



Movie adaptation brings 'Victor/Victoria' to stage

By guest reviewer Rebecca Ralstin



Vida Bikales/The Arts Asylum

“Victoria/Victoria” could seem both timely and yet out of step with the moment; but, The Barn’s production of the musical, (adapted from a 1982 film starring Julie Andrews, James Garner, Robert Preston and Lesley Ann Warren) guarantees family entertainment – big time.

A cheeky comedy the musical “Victor/Victoria” takes on social themes and issues that continue to remain relevant. From sexual identity to gendered tropes, the musical is a time capsule of the attitudes of the time period when written. “Victor/Victoria” attempts to take a progressive view on LGBTQ

issues but while using self-deprecating humor toward queerness keeping it safely fenced in the realm of gaslight theatres and speak easies. Even when the jokes and tropes haven't aged well, the colorful and united cast, tell a delightful and engaging story. With skilled performers, colorful costumes, dance numbers and duets, the Barn Players make for an entertaining night that does not disappoint.

At the Arts Asylum, viewers return to the night life world of dance clubs and lounge singers, where the veil between what is and what might be is used to entertain, cajole and tease. The shows open in a Paris night club, nothing reveals a specific time or period. The audience feels that it's certainly not today, but not too far into the past.

The production begins slowly, but steadily builds energy, setting the stage for the "meet cute" comedy that is about to transpire. Dudley Hogue as Carroll "Toddy" Todd immediately charms the audience because he acts as the effervescent and unstoppable instigator of the events about to transpire.

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After his dreamily sung introduction, the audience swiftly meets a cast of characters that command the stage in their own right. The ensemble is used quite effectively to help paint the set as the show moves from scene to scene in the Parisian

night life ripe for action.

“Victor/Victoria” opens in a presumably seedy night club that seeks to rise in reputation by attracting more upscale clientele through avant garde entertainment. The night club matron, Henriette Labisse played by Breanna McConaughy, has zero time for the games of Toddy and his scheming ways to make a franc or two in the performance world.

A freezing and starving Victoria Grant played by Erica Baruth, blows through the door seeking reprieve from the cold, finds kindness and friendship in Toddy. The chemistry between these two veteran actors, Baruth and Hogue, bring the audience in as the journey develops and leads the audience.

As viewers quickly learn, the night club scene is no different from that of the everyday working actor where each performer needs to hustle and make his/her own work. Toddy weaves together a wonderful guise for Victoria, a self-proclaimed “2nd rate soprano” in desperate need of work and longing for respect in the performance industry. What better way for Victoria to get work than spin her narrative as a man named Victor performing as his feminine alter ego, Victoria? Baruth does a beautiful job conjuring the famous Julie Andrews who originated the titular role, while at the same time finessing her performance with her own unique touch and polish.

As the story picks up pace, the audience meets the infamous King Marchan played by Brian Larios, a gangster from Chicago who could potentially launch and legitimize the budding career of male soprano, Victor. Flanked by his obnoxious and eager girlfriend, Norma Cassidy played by Breanna Castor and his bodyguard, Squash Bernstein played by Christopher Cording, conflict awaits.

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What could go wrong as these characters meet in the Parisian night life? McConaughey's Henriette Labisse quickly sees through the guise of Victor/Victoria and aims to reveal both Victoria and Toddy as frauds as a barrage of physical comedy ensues.

There is instant attraction all across the board to Victoria as she portrays herself as Victor, the female impersonating singer. Larios' King Marchan can barely believe his attraction to a "man" to be true and sets off a series of events to prove the true gender of Victor/Victoria.

At this point, the script runs into some dated and sometimes difficult to digest jokes that have not aged very well in an LGBTQ conscious world. Castor's obnoxious Norma does a delicious job bringing levity to her scenes, while Chirstoph Cording's Squash absolutely steals scene with unbreakable stoic choices giving balance to the camp and physical comedy of the show.

The engaging chemistry between many of the cast members creates the greatest strength of the whole production. These strong and entertaining actors create clear and relatable characters within this hyperbolic world. The set functions as a simple framework for the actors to play within and heighten

the physical comedy throughout the show. The dance numbers help and hurt with some numbers exciting the audience to applause.

Applaud each and every single one of these performers who have volunteered their time and talent to take on "Victor/Victoria" finding its relevance in the contemporary repertoire in the theatre vernacular.

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Kipp Simmons chose well by trusting his actors to tell this sometimes problematic story by allowing them to bring truth and honesty to what could otherwise be a trope filled night of folly. This ensemble cast works very well together in telling what is ultimately a love story across the board.

The cast does a lovely job breathing some new life into this fun, provocative and sometimes dated script. "Victor/Victoria" delivers some spiked punch moments of classic stylized physical comedy with bubbling camp.

The cast of Barn Players production of "Victor/Victoria" includes: Erica Baruth as Victoria Grant / Victor; Dudley Hogue as her gay accomplice Toddy; Brian Larios as her confused paramour King Marchan; Brenna Castor as the ditzy Norma Cassidy; Christoph Cording as King's henchman Squash

Bernstein; Brenna McConaughy as club owner Henriette Labisse; and Korey Childs as impresario Andre Cassell. Citizens of Paris are being played by: Jeannette Bonjour, Tony Francisco, Andrea Hoble, Megan McCranie, Ashley McGuire, Jessica Michael, Matt Runnels, Gabriel Van Dyne, Miles Wirth.

The show is being Directed by Kipp Simmons; with Musical Direction is by maestro Kevin Bogan; choreography is by Valerie Martin; Stage Management is by MacKenzie Sammons; Scenic Construction is by Bill Wright; Costume Design is by Sarah Jeter; Lighting Design is by Rachael Carney; Props Design is by Zoie Perahoritis; and Sound Design is by Sean Leistico.



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The "Victor/Victoria band is: Kevin Bogan, keyboard 1; Todd Gregory-Gibbs, keyboard 2; Deana Wagoner, keyboard 3; Frank annechini, bass; Joel McCoy, drums; Blake Vignery, drumsp
Debbie Allen, reed1/2; Greg Taubran, reed 3; Ron Mundt, reed 4; Danielle Mays, reed 5; Michael Sevantes, trumpet; Chacko Finn, trombone 1; Ken Tysick, trombone 2; Kim Ico, violin.

The Barn Players



The Barn Players' production of "Victor/Victoria" runs through Nov. 24th Thursday, Friday, Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. at Kansas City's Arts Asylum. An under produced musical, it's certainly worth the time and money to go out and support.

About the guest reviewer Rebecca Ralstin:

Rebecca is local actress in playwright. The theatre bug bit her at a young age and she was blessed to have and still have friends and family that have never discouraged her passion. Once upon a time she was a young playwright as a student in the Coterie Theatre's Young Playwrights Writing Round Table. As an actress, you may recognize her from various productions around the city on stage and off and few local commercials. Her character range swings from the heartwarming Mary Bailey in "It's A Wonderful Life" to the devilishly delightful Lu in Pete Bakely's "Jo." She is a lover of all things theatre and hopes to share this passion and encourage more people to take

part in storytelling as performers and patrons.

Tags: "Victor/Victoria" review, The Barn Players, The Arts Asylum, Kansas City Theatre, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment