

CityPULSE

Oh what a beautiful show



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Paul Wozniak

REVIEW

“Oklahoma!” is sweeping down the plains of East Lansing and it’s a must-see show. High expectations come with producing one of the most popular and parodied Broadway musicals ever created. But the Michigan State University Department of Theatre production, now playing at the Fairchild Theatre, is so good that you will forget you’re watching collegiate actors.

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s groundbreaking show about horny farmers and cowboys first opened in 1943 to a culturally divided nation. With few exceptions, it’s remarkable how resonant “Oklahoma!” still feels in 2019.

Two sitcom worthy love triangles drive the plot; one between a charming cowboy Curly (Chase Cain), a stubborn and savvy lass Laurey (Isa Rodriguez) and her brooding hired hand Jud (Ryan Adolph), and the other between the dimwitted Will (Kevin Mazur), the sexually woke Ado Annie (Anna Birmingham) and the put-upon peddler Ali Hakim (Kevin Craig).

After lots of singing and dancing to timeless songs like “Oh What a Beautiful Mornin’,” “The Surrey with the Fringe on Top,” “People Will Say We’re in Love,” “The Farmer and the Cowman” and, of course, “Oklahoma!” the right girls end up with the right guys and some peace is restored on the prairie.

The entire cast is strong from the star crossed lovers to the supporting cast and ensemble including Sharon Combs as the sassy Aunt Eller and Zaria Aikens as the gender swapped, but still fearsome, Andie Carnes. They make Alisa Hauser’s complicated choreography look effortless and blend beautifully with music director Dave Wendelberger’s lush pit orchestra.

The nod to modernity and parallels with today’s home delivery lifestyle are visible in the stunning set designed by Kirk A. Domer, which frames the stage with giant banners printed with turn of the century Sears & Roebuck catalog pages. Domer’s set leaves plenty of room for Rachel Aho’s lighting and media design that include hyper-realistic moving clouds and the isolating glare of Jud’s smokehouse.

“Oklahoma!” is not written and paced like a present day musical (Laurey has a 10-minute dream ballet about who she should go to a dance with) but director Brad Willcuts keeps the show moving despite its almost three-hour runtime. Like an Aaron Copland symphony, “Oklahoma!” is golden age Americana at its most pure, and this production does it justice.

MSU Department of Theatre

7:30 p.m. Wednesday- Thursday Feb. 20-21; 8 p.m. Friday Feb. 22; 2 p.m. & 8 p.m. Saturday Feb. 23; 2 p.m. Sunday Feb. 24 ** Post-Show Discussion on Thursday, Feb. 21, 2019 (Following the Performance) \$22 general admission/\$20 seniors and faculty/\$10 children 12 and under The Fairchild Theatre, 542 Auditorium Rd, East Lansing (800) WHARTON, Whartoncenter.com