

Anne of Green Gables

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Press



Boston Globe Theatre Review

As a musical, 'Anne' struggles to find right balance

By Terry Byrne

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

"Anne of Green Gables," the story of an orphan girl adopted by an aging brother and sister on idyllic Prince Edward Island, has been charming readers since it was first published in 1908. The book has sold more than 50 million copies, and has been adapted several times for film, television and the stage. This musical version of the story now at Wheelock Family Theatre is the one that has been performed in Charlottetown in the Canadian island province every summer since 1965, and while the story may be timeless, this musical feels dated.

Despite some terrific ensemble work and a feisty performance by Jennifer Beth Glick in the title role, Norman Campbell's score is melodically limited, so few of the songs stand out. The story line follows Lucy Maud Montgomery's novel, but the approach is superficial, as if we're getting a selection of unrelated highlights: Anne's temper gets her in trouble; Anne accidentally gets her friend drunk on homemade wine; Anne worries that she's ugly and dyes her hair. The incidents all appear in the novel, but they aren't presented here with any dramatic tension or sense that we are on a journey with these characters.

Glick does a terrific job illustrating Anne's oversize imagination and forthright manner in the song "Gee I'm Glad I'm No One Else But Me." She gets lots of support from Anne's best friend, Diana Barry (Jenna Lea Scott), even though their duet, "Kindred Spirits," sounds like a weak knockoff of any number of Jerry Herman songs (think "Mame," or "Hello, Dolly!"). Also, Anne's love-hate relationship with Gilbert Blythe (Bradley Jensen) and his jealous girlfriend, Josie (Kaitee Tredway), becomes the focus of the story, distracting attention from Anne's relationship with her adopted family, Matthew Cuthbert (Robert Saoud) and his sister Marilla (Jacqui Parker).

Saoud does a lovely turn as the quiet, gentle Matthew and even though the lyrics to his ballad, "The Words," are soppy with sentiment, Saoud's direct delivery finds some sincerity there. Parker is also strong as the stern Marilla, whose disappointment about receiving a girl orphan rather than the boy she and Matthew requested, slowly turns to affection.

The musical's best moments come in the production numbers featuring the children in the cast. Choreographer Laurel Conrad has devised combinations that highlight the talents of the Wheelock ensemble, particularly "Where Did the Summer Go To?" and the "Pageant Song." But director Jane Staab is overly fond of parading the cast up and down the aisles, which slows the action down and pulls the audience out of the story.

At intermission, Emma Harris, 7, of Milton said she was enjoying it, but wasn't quite sure how it would all turn out. But she confided, "I think Gilbert and Anne are going to like each other." There's nothing wrong with that, but by taking the focus off Anne's indomitable spirit, we lose Montgomery's theme of a young girl's struggle to find a balance between her imagination and social expectations.

-Terry Byrne

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Chelsea/Revere/Winthrop/Saugus/ Charlestown

'Anne of Green Gables' Review by Sheila Barth

Wednesday, November 7, 2012



Ever since the 1908 publication of Lucy Maud (L.M.) Montgomery's beloved novel about lonely, imaginative orphan, "Anne of Green Gables," and its subsequent series spanning to 1939, readers internationally have fallen in love with her and the local characters of the small, verdant village of Avonlea, Prince Edward Island (PEI).

Montgomery's red-haired, freckle-faced heroine inspired movies and, most especially, Donald Harron's 1965 musical adaptation, with its 26 hummable songs, performed internationally, and is an annual staple at the Charlottetown, PEI festival. Tourists also visit the original Green Gables house (which Montgomery's elderly cousins owned), and the surrounding lands, a preservation of PEI National Park. Montgomery was raised nearby, in her strict grandparents' home in Cavendish.

Besides individual differences, the play tackles small-town gossip, jealousy, friendship, loyalty, and more. The author's high-spirited Anne – spelled with a final e – possesses a dramatic,

runaway imagination and a feisty temper that, along with her red hair and abundance of freckles, sets her apart.

To soothe Anne's loneliness and pain of feeling "ugly" looking, the child pretends she's Lady Cordelia of Montmorency, a princess, whom nobody can demean.

At Wheelock Family Theatre's production, helmed by Director Jane Staab, talented actress Jennifer Beth Glick portrays the talkative, sensitive Anne with youthful spunkiness, curiosity, and a desire for love and acceptance. Although the orphanage in Halifax was supposed to send a boy to help aging Matthew Cuthbert with farm chores, they mistakenly sent this small chatterbox of a girl, whom Matthew loves instantly. However, his sister, Marilla, wants to send Anne back right away.

When Anne colors her sad chronicle as an abused orphan in two previous homes, Marilla reluctantly relents. Robert Saoud as the stammering, kindly Matthew is wonderfully loving and tender here, while Jacqui Parker delivers her usual outstanding performance. Marilla is shocked when Anne loses her temper with adult friend Rachel (Boston's acclaimed Maureen Keiller), who offhandedly calls Anne homely, but Anne's melodramatic apology in her outstanding solo, "Oh, Mrs. Lynde," wins them over.

There's happiness, too. When Anne meets her new, and only friend, giggly, exuberant Diana Barry, the two little girls frolic about in the song, "Kindred Spirits." Jenna Lea Scott beams as Diana, spreading joy in every scene she appears. Anne's also inspired by her new teacher, Miss Stacey (Ceit Zweil), who teaches the children to "Open the Windows" and learn about the world around them.

The upbeat 32-member cast, garbed in Lisa Simpson's charming 1800's costumes, are lively and harmonious, prancing, dancing, and singing on stage, up and down theatre aisles, and in the main aisle, delighting wide-eyed, excited children. Matthew Lazure's set, with its period school desks, chalkboard, slates, small general store and farmhouse, lends historic, charming touches.

Music Director Robert Rucinski on keyboard and his six merry musicians nicely accompany all numbers, while choreographer Laurel Conrad capitalizes on picnic games, such as the three-legged race and egg-and-spoon race, and energetic folk dances.

Audiences of all ages are enjoying this timeless, family-friendly production.

Anne of Green Gables

by Kilian Melloy - EDGEBoston - Monday Oct 29, 2012



The Wheelock Family Theatre once again mounts a top-notch production, as director Jane Staab helms a musical play based on the 1908 children's classic "**Anne of Green Gables**" by L. M. Montgomery. (The initials stand for "Lucy Maud," by the way.)

This wholesome story is so charming and so engaging that it's no surprise to find it thriving as a vibrant stage play. First premiered in 1965, the musical has enjoyed annual productions ever since as part of the Charlottetown Festival on Prince Edward's Island, Canada, where the story is set.

The traditional elements of the classic kids' story are all in place: A smart, imaginative orphan, Anne (Jennifer Beth Glick), is sent to adoptive parents Matthew (Robert Saoud) and Marilla (Jacqui Parker) Cuthbert. (The Cuthberts are not a married couple; she's a spinster, and he's her bachelor brother. Evidently, "non-traditional" families are nothing new.) The

Cuthberts are taken aback: They had asked for a boy to help them with the farmwork. But Anne is such a lively girl that Matthew and Marilla quickly discard their plan to send her back to the orphanage and decide to keep her.

Winning over the town at large is a different matter. At first, Anne's wild imagination causes some consternation for the gentle folks of Avonlea, such as Mrs. Lynde (Maureen Keiller) and schoolteacher Mr. Phillips (Nick Sulfaro). Moreover, her sensitivity about her looks (red hair and freckles) provokes her to flights of pure rage -- to the astonishment and fascination of young Gilbert Blythe (Bradley Jensen), a development that incites the jealous rage of Josie Pye (Kaitee Tredway). In time, of course, Anne's curiosity, generosity, and cheerful disposition make friends out of the town's most skeptical citizens. But will the smitten Gilbert ever convince Anne to forgive his thoughtless remarks?

The Wheelock Family Theatre's venue seems custom-built for grand productions, and set designer Matthew T. Lazure has a field day, imagining Green Gables as a two-story house in cutaway so that we can observe action taking place in and around the house in several locales at once... a handy thing, especially in the scene in which Matthew, who warms to Anne more quickly than Marilla, spirits the girl out of her room from under Marilla's nose, but gets her safely back just before his sister comes upstairs to check in on her. The backdrop looks a bit like a home spun quilt, and a bit like the fields and meadows of an agrarian community from a century past. The cumulative effect provokes nostalgia for a simpler time, and invests the audience emotionally in the setting and the community of Avonlea, where Anne works to fit in and can't help but stand out.

But standing out is part of the joy of this production; the cast comes spilling from the stage and into the aisles repeatedly, transforming the entire theater into a performance space and bringing some extra

charge into a highly energetic production. Lisa Simpson's costumes look smashing on stage, but they are just as gorgeous up close.

Musical Director Robert L. Rucinski does a superlative job with the show's 26 numbers, as do the singing members of the cast -- especially Glick, who belts her renditions with charm and verve. (She undertakes the production's second song, "Gee I'm Glad I'm No One Else But Me" with such gusto and delight that Matthew is not the only one who's taken with Anne; she has the audience eating out of her hand from then on.)

Saoud's shy Matthew is another charmer; he despairs of learning to express himself in "The Words," but his tendency to be tongue-tied is a source of high comedy. He can't get the words out in "General Store," the hilarious song in which he tries to buy a fancy dress for Anne and bystanders helpfully pile purchases on as they try to make out what he's looking for.

Parker's Marilla is one of those characters that seems tough on the outside, but who turns out to be tenderly devoted. Her turn at a reprise of "The Words" will bring tears to many an eye.

"Anne of Green Gables" is a perfect choice for the Wheelock Family Theatre: A show that's adult-level sophisticated while retaining kid-friendly fun.

"Anne of Green Gables" plays through Nov. 18 at the Wheelock Family Theatre, 180 The Riverway, in Boston. Tickets cost \$20, \$25, and \$30; teens pay \$15 on Fridays.

Performance schedule: Friday and Saturday nights at 7:30; Saturday and Sunday matinees at 3 pm. ASL / AD performances will be Nov. 16 at 7:30 and Nov. 18 at 3:00. For tickets and more information please visit www.WheelockFamilyTheatre.org

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BOSTON ARTS REVIEW 10.31.2012

EXUBERANT MUSICAL AT WHEELOCK

Review by Beverly Creasey



ANNE OF GREEN GABLES is the kind of delightful entertainment the Wheelock Family Theatre does best. The Campbell/Harron musical based on the L.M. Montgomery novel is kid friendly and adult deep. ANNE OF GREEN GABLES (playing through November 18th) is the loving story of a little orphan girl from Prince Edward Island who does not lack reserve. Anne (with an “e”) always speaks her mind, much to the chagrin of the elderly brother and sister who wanted a boy to help with the farm but quickly fell in love with the spunky whirlwind.

Lucy Maud Montgomery created a world where wrongs are soon righted and misunderstandings soon straightened out...and sometimes adults are as naughty as children. Audiences will respond to the lively songs and spirited antics of the young actors onstage and no one, no one could resist Jennifer Beth Glick as Anne. Glick lights up the musical with her unstoppable exuberance. Glick and Robert Saoud, as the elderly farmer who adopts Anne, create a transcendent father-daughter relationship, making the musical far more than “a children’s story.” I found tears in my eyes, remembering my father, whenever he rescued her or comforted her or did something special for her.

Director Jane Staab’s remarkable cast features Jacqui Parker as Saoud’s stern sister, not as easily won over by Anne. Parker somehow manages to show us the woman’s inward journey, slowly growing with affection for the little girl. Plenty of comic turns grace the musical, from Maureen Keiller’s ever present busybody to Susan Bigger’s absentminded adoption agent to Gamalia Pharms’ eager gossip. Music director Robert L. Rucinski gets fine singing from the ensemble and lovely numbers like “Ice Cream” and “Kindred Spirits” for Glick and Jenna Lea Scott as Anne’s true friend. See what Wheelock can do better than anyone: To present theater which reflects all of us onstage with stories than touch everyone.

11/09/2012 TheaterMirror.com

ANNE TO THE RESCUE! by Janine de Souza

Ah! I love Nickelodeon, especially Nick at Nite. It's a quirky kind of TV twilight zone that time travels back electronically to all the old shows that you grew up with and loved. No one ages. That '70s hair style still looks "Welcome Back Kotter" fresh. Every show is tied up with a pink bow of happiness and there's a Snuggie-like comfort around you as you indulge. Way back when, there used to be an old show on TV called Underdog. It was a cartoon parody of Superman as a dog. Whenever the lovely Sweet Polly Purebred was in trouble, Underdog flew to the rescue shouting, "There's no need to fear-- Underdog is here!" Okay, so what does this have to do with **ANNE OF GREEN GABLES**, the newest musical production at the Wheelock Family Theatre? Everything! You see, Anne, (don't even think about forgetting the e) is the adorable and enthusiastic Underdog of this musical story.

Adapted by Donald Harron and based on the autobiography of Canadian author, Lucy Maud Montgomery, **ANNE OF GREEN GABLES** is the musical journey of an orphan named Anne Shirley (Jennifer Beth Glick) who comes to live with Marilla (Jacqui Parker) and Matthew Cuthbert (Robert Saoud) on their farm. Once Anne arrives, Matthew immediately bonds to the overly dramatic and linguistically gifted youngster. His sister, Marilla, however, needs much more convincing, but she too soon falls under Anne's spell. Under the skillful direction of Jane Staab, this show seamlessly glides from one side of the stage to the other and even spills into the aisles of the theater. A bicycle rides down the center aisle while turn-of-the-century school girls and boys frolic, run, and sing within inches of amazed audience members. It's distinctly Wheelock and it's also Wheelock at its best! One of those school girls is Josie Pye (Kaitee Tredway) who becomes jealous of Anne when her beau, Gilbert Blythe (Bradley Jensen), falls in love with the feisty redhead. Josie bullies, intimidates, lies, and spreads rumors to poison the minds of those around her. But Josie and all the other adults behaving badly in her life have no idea what they are in for. Anne stands up for herself using her talented silver tongue and her street wits. I guess it's true... "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Even though, the story takes place in the early 1900s, kids these days still navigate and face the same challenges. Bullies still thrive and exist, except now they have expanded their arsenal to cyberspace via Facebook, email, and cell phones. This is an empowering and uplifting show for kids, especially young girls, who feel peer pressure and the need to fit in on a daily basis. Additionally, all of the songs in this delightful musical take the audience to a simpler time with their joyful and exuberant melodies under the musical direction of Robert L. Rucinski. Finally, the main characters in this musical are played brilliantly by Jennifer Glick, Jacqui Parker, and Robert Saoud who pull out all the stops in their performances and pull a mesmerized audience in.

ANNE OF GREEN GABLES represents the Underdog in all of us. It's that part of you that's tucked away in a dusty place and that won't give up and won't back down. She's the part of us (even adults) that still thinks the brass ring exists and that if we just stretch a little bit further, maybe we really can reach up and grab it.

Superfluous Songs, Sweet Spirit: ANNE OF GREEN GABLES

Theater Geek. Com 10/27/2012

Review by Craig Idlebrook



Script adapted by Don Harron

Score by Norman Campbell

Directed by Jane Staab

presented by [Wheelock Family Theatre](#), 200 The Riverway, Boston, MA

October 19th – November 18th, 2012

The *Anne of Green Gables* franchise is prone to schmaltz. Any literary series that is adored by pre-teen girls, misty-eyed elderly women and Japanese soap opera anime fans can't help but spin off some over-the-top theater. Few productions can find that young-at-heart sweet spot captured so perfectly by the series' original creator L.M. Montgomery. Anne, the orphan girl who shakes up Prince Edward Island with her sentimental and vibrant perspective, is the tragic optimist in all of us. Wheelock Family Theatre's production of the musical *Anne of Green Gables* largely succeeds in capturing the sweet spirit of the original tale with a strong cast that commits to looking at the world through the unjaded prism of youth.

The production's success is doubly impressive because this show had such an unsatisfactory script to use. While the show's text writer, Don Harron, largely doesn't get in the way of the best moments of the original story, his musical partner Norman Campbell and he are largely not up to the task of creating a credible musical. The story is weighed down by forgettable songs that serve no dramatic purpose, and it is a wonder that the audience keeps its attention on the show, at all.

The fact that the audience, at least half children, stays in the game is a testament to Jennifer Beth Glick, who helms the play with her pitch-perfect performance as melodramatic Anne. Glick not only brings a ton of energy to the part, but she seems to be able to change emotions as quickly as Anne, and she is able to keep stride of Anne's roller coaster emotional existence. Director Jane Staab also does a great job making sure that the cast buys into the script, even during the script's weakest moments. Every song, even the structurally-painful-to-listen-to ones, is delivered with gusto, and Staab uses imaginative blocking to allow the action to spill out into the audience and keep kids guessing what will happen next.

Staab and the cast save the show from mediocrity and raise it to the level where the audience can walk away with a wistful sigh. Thanks to their efforts, this play will be a treat for the young and young-at-heart, if less so for the musically sensitive.