

'I Love You Because' shines

By David Winkelstern
For the Lansing City Pulse
May 3 2018

Now and then, a local show makes it easy to forget it is a community theater production. Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.'s "I Love You Because," is one of those shows. Their musical has elements of a professional show: expert acting, skilled singing, solid songs, proficient musicians, precision movements and choreography and costumes that do not seem acquired from a secondhand warehouse. Even the set is fitting for big-time theater.

Jake Przybyla plays Austin Bennet, a traditional, stiff, deliberate, and always-fellow. Przybyla commands the lead flair and confidence. Christine Ciucanu, spontaneous and free-spirited Marcy Fitzwilliams, is the opposite of Austin. performances in the musical set in New City are worthy of a Big Apple stage.



Brian Farnham as Jeff Bennet, smartly not-always-so-smart brother. Farnham the vocabulary-challenged older sibling would not be caught dead in a tie. In the with adult language, lots of drinking, sexual incidents, Jeff spends much of time being oddly charming in underwear, especially when suffering during a romantic moment.

ina-tie
role with
as the

Both
York

plays a
shines as
who
show
and
his stage

back pain

In the musical about falling in and out of love — and trying to understand what true love is — Meghan Eldred-Woolsey is Jeff's love interest, Diana Bingley. Eldred-Woolsey's ability to perfectly spout rapid-fire dialogue, radiate real emotion, and be comedic earns her pro status.

Racheal Raymer and Zach Riley delightfully portray five separate characters. It doesn't matter that their disguises are minimal when they switch from restaurant to coffee shop to Chinese restaurant employees to other scene-stealing roles. Their body language, altered voices and facial expressions make every hilarious character change appreciated.

The mighty singing voices of the cast confirms its ace status. A highlight is when they spotlight high notes in the highly melodic, lighthearted and heartbreaking, songs.

Whenever couples or the entire cast sing together, the harmonies are tighter than a pair of spandex pants and tight enough to discern a stamp and its value in the back pocket.

The songs, with lyrics by Ryan Cunningham and music by Joshua Salzman, are clever, structured, witty, and emotional. A truly professional five-piece band conducted by Angie Constien-Schwab, gives the tunes real power.

Direction by Michele Booher-Purosky and choreography by Karyn Perry, both sometimes joyfully slapstick, seem faultless. Kris Maier's costumes look tailor-made and sometimes earn laughs of their own. The set by Tom Ferris rates saving and renting to an accomplished touring company of "I Love You Because."

Moveable walls transform into a restaurant, coffee shop, bedroom, bar, living room and more — all framed with a New York City skyline. Props by Amanda and Kya Macomber, and Gloria Vivalda include tap handles, reversible signs, and appropriate furniture that are perfect add-ons.

I did not have affection for the play because of its altered, modern version of "Pride and Prejudice" or its "Hallmark" predictability. I loved "I Love You Because" because I loved seeing a big city performance without having to travel any further than the Miller Auditorium on Lansing's South Side.