

In The Heights

Review by Jane Zussman

January 26, 2013

Since we were planning to attend **IN THE HEIGHTS** tonight, I was pleased to see this Facebook post by Jerry Mattson singing its praises:

"Peppermint Creek Theatre Company hits another home run! In the Heights opened last night with a super-energized production of the Tony-winning show, bringing to life the Latino community of Washington Heights. Director Chad DeKatch and choreographer Karyn Perry have put together an ensemble that sparkles, a miracle really, considering that the cast ranges from the experienced pros (Amanda Whitehead DeKatch, Sara Blossom Bostwick, AnnaMaria Horn, Judith Evans) to debut theatre performances from Juan Salazar, Niki LaBelle, and Ramon Hernandez, to name a few. But the show rests on the broad shoulders of Juan Salazar, whose hip-hop riffs establish and maintain the excited forward motion of this story of the struggles of those at the margins of society. I'm sure it's not an original observation, but "In the Heights" could be a 21st-century reprise of "West Side Story."

I know it's "cheating" to quote Jerry's review, but I can't say it better myself. Wonderful show! Hard to believe Juan Salazar was making his theatrical debut! (Rumor has it he's "retiring" after this show, so all the more reason not to miss it!)

I'll just add that the singing and dancing were excellent. Kudos to music director Seth Burk and his unseen five-piece orchestra. It's hard to tell where the choreography ends and the blocking begins but the motion was magical. To make room for the large cast of 20, the set was minimal but effective and authentic. Chad Badgero told me he traveled to Washington Heights and took photographs, which were blown up on panels and cubes that were realistic, yet symbolic, and easily and quickly movable.

Outstanding performers not named by Jerry are the energetic Brennan Hattaway and the talented Diego Love Ramirez, (well remembered from his performance in Altar Boyz.) The script is laced with Spanish, but you don't have to be Latino to love it. It brings an array of universal human conflicts, hopes, dreams, and challenges to life, in an uplifting musical package.

In the Heights continues through Saturday, February 2. 8pm shows with ONE 2pm matinee, Sunday January 27.

Miller Performing Arts Center is on Curry Lane, off Miller Road, just west of the south Cedar intersection.

NOTE the show was SOLD OUT tonight; so call or go online to get those reservations ASAP

\$17 general admission

\$12 student/senior 65+

www.peppermintcreektheatre.com

call Arts Tickets 517-372-0945, Tues - Friday, noon to 4pm