

Lansing City Pulse Review
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Meta-musical

“**[title of show]**” pulls back the curtain on the writing process

Stop for just a moment and ask your self this question: What if life were like a Broadway musical? Imagine me singing this second sentence as if it were a song lyric. What would the accompanying score to your life sound like?

“**[title of show]**,” Peppermint Creek Theater Co.’s latest production, is a 90-minute comic romp. The Tony-winning play-within-a-play, written by Hunter Bell and Jeff Bowen, gives audiences a behind-the-scenes look at the process of writing musical theater.



Director Ben Cassidy has injected an intense and insistent urgency into this production, adding sizzle to the already brisk and bright lyrics of the book. Edric Haleen performs both off stage as music director and on stage as Larry, the piano player, leading the five-person cast through delightfully dissonant harmonies. The choreography by Karyn Perry is clever and original.

Joe Quick and Scott Laban, who play portray Jeff and Hunter, respectively, have the rare ability to act while singing — in tune, even — with great dramatic effect. Nicole Martin, as Susan, and Maggie Smith, as Heidi, are both in strong in their supporting roles.

The magic of “[**title of show**]” is that the musical is seemingly being written right before our eyes. It opens with a rock ‘em-sock ‘em number entitled “Untitled Opening Number.” The play proceeds through every high and low theme of the writing process as the characters dream, struggle and wait for fame and fortune to land in their laps.

Quick and Laban perform most of the songs, mostly duets at first, then jazzy and melodic four-person dance numbers. But Martin and Smith get their moment in the sun, belting out the pointed “Montage Part 2: Secondary Characters.”

There is a lot of tricky lighting necessary to show the shifting back and forth from one apartment to another, and the crew nails it time after time. Sound quality is excellent as well.

This show suits the summer season well. It is light-hearted yet instructive, revealing the off-stage vulnerabilities that are always behind the staged scenes in front of our eyes.