



STAR-MAKING VEHICLE: Jim Belushi & outstanding newcomer Nina Arianda in the Broadway revival of *Born Yesterday*. Photo: Carol Rosegg

Theater Review

Born Yesterday: **Nina Arianda's blonde ambition**



BORN YESTERDAY

Written by Garson Kanin

Directed by Doug Hughes

Cort Theatre

138 West 48th Street

New York, NY

(212-239-6200), www.BornYesterdayonBroadway.com

By David NouNou

Handsomely mounted and deftly directed by Doug Hughes, Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday* is one of those enigmatic plays that is dated not so much for its content but for its idealism. Not that we don't have corrupt brutes and politicians that could be bought for personal gains today. But, oh, for those wonderful days when through a little bit of learning and thinking, one could bring down to their knees these unethical bullies and politicians.

1946 is the time, and a Washington, D.C. hotel suite is the setting. An uncouth, corrupt tycoon, Harry Brock (Jim Belushi), brings his business advisor, Ed Devery (Frank Wood) and showgirl mistress, Billie Dawn (Nina Arianda) with him to Washington. Billie's ignorance and ditziness does not fit with Harry's business dealings, so he hires a journalist, Paul Verrall (Robert Sean Leonard), to educate her and smooth out her rough edges. In the process of learning and thinking for herself, Billie realizes how corrupt Harry is and interferes with his plans to bribe a Senator (Terry Beaver) in passing legislation for Brock's personal gains.

Born Yesterday was a huge hit when it opened in 1946 and ran for years when Judy Holliday was Billie Dawn, and made an instant star out of her. In 1950, a movie was made with Ms. Holliday again playing Billie Dawn, the part that earned her the Oscar, beating out worthier opponents like Bette Davis as Margo Channing in *All About Eve* and Gloria Swanson as Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*. The part became so identified with Ms. Holliday that it pigeonholed her in ditzy, dumb blonde roles all her life, which diminished the part of Billie Dawn.

Billie Dawn has finally found redemption. Nina Arianda is now playing her. She has not only taken over the role of Billie Dawn; she has reinvented her and given her new life. I can never see the movie *Born Yesterday* again without thinking of Ms Arianda's incandescent Billie Dawn. Being near Tony time, it will be pretty hard to imagine anyone else up at the podium receiving the Best Actress award for 2011.

As played by Jim Belushi, his Harry Brock is serviceable. He is properly uncouth, but his brutishness is "acted" out. His use of broad strokes is more suited for TV than the stage. He has not acquired the ease and technique for the stage like the rest of his fellow cast members. Robert Sean Leonard, on the other hand, has his role of Paul Verrall, the journalist/educator down pat with a delightful stage presence. Frank Wood as Harry's advisor, Ed, and Terry Beaver as the senator gives their usual reliable, focused performances. They can always be relied on to deliver the dramatic goods.

I strongly urge our readers to see *Born Yesterday* and savor one of the great joys/performances of the 2010-2011 theater season, and that joy is Nina Arianda. Remember her name; it will be around for a long time.

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Editor's Note: www.StageZine.com, celebrating our 1-Year Anniversary on the Internet. We want to express our gratitude to all the theater PR professionals, industry organizations, and, most of all, our readers, followers and fans for their continued support and kind words throughout the past year, helping make www.StageZine.com a success.

Broadway Listings

NouNou On Broadway

Broadway Capsule Reviews by David NouNou

DRAMA & COMEDY REVIVALS



A star is 'Born': Nina Arianda in *Born Yesterday*. Photo: Carol Rosegg



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CORT THEATRE, 138 Broadway at 47th Street, (212-239-6200).

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