



THEY'RE ALL GONNA LAUGH AT YOU: Molly Ranson in revival of musical adaptation of *Carrie*. Photo: Joan Marcus



Theater Review
**Revival of *Carrie* a
missed opportunity**

CARRIE

Music by Michael Gore

Lyrics by Dean Pitchford

Book by Lawrence D. Cohen

Based on the novel by Stephen King

Directed by Stafford Arima

Through April 22, 2012

Lucille Lortel Theatre

121 Christopher Street

(212-239-6200), www.mcctheatre.org

By Scott Harrah

Anyone familiar with theatrical history has heard of the infamous 1988 Broadway musical adaptation of Stephen King's *Carrie*. The show was so dreadful and over the top that it's considered a camp classic today. So it is truly unfortunate that this revival, nearly a quarter of a century later, treats *Carrie* with the reverence normally reserved for a cherished oldie, instead of playing up the so-bad-it's-good elements that made the original train wreck such a legendary flop.

Director Stafford Arima should have taken a cue from the current Off-Broadway

adaptation of another horror film, *SILENCE! The Musical*, and turned *Carrie* into a fun-loving, satirical spoof. Imagine the sheer lunacy that could have been portrayed, with Carrie White (Molly Ranson), her fundamentalist Christian mother (Marin Mazzie), and the endless, humorous possibilities with pig blood, knife fights, and telekinetic powers. Done that way, the show would be a hoot and run for years. Alas, instead, here we get nothing but a straightforward re-staging that is too mired in the mediocrity of the half-baked book and leaden score to be truly entertaining. And no wonder: the show's original book, music and lyric writers brought back *Carrie* in a misguided attempt to "improve" it as a stage musical.

However, one knows this production is a missed opportunity because *Carrie* has a built-in cult audience that's expecting to see the show as the inferior theatrical bomb it is and have a few laughs with it. Even younger fans that never saw the Broadway version would still have the 1976 Brian De Palma film and Mr. King's novel as a frame of reference.

What we see here is an overly long, toned-down production that might be true to the story, but is not terribly exciting, especially if one is only familiar with the movie. Ms. Ranson as Carrie White, and Ms. Mazzie, as mother Margaret White, are both outstanding and have wonderful voices, which they show off well in the song "Evening Prayers." Carmen Cusack, as sympathetic gym teacher Miss Gardiner, also gives a stellar performance. Most of act one is bogged down with unnecessary songs that the mean kids at Carrie's Maine high school sing. Modern touches, such as teens using smartphones, have been added, but they add little to the tale.

The much-maligned opening number of act two, "A Night We'll Never Forget," does not contain the notorious offstage squealing pigs that got uncomfortable laughs in the Broadway version decades ago. While there's a few nicely sung songs, such as Ms. Mazzie giving her all to "When There's No One," so much of the climax of *Carrie* has been restrained that it just comes across as dull when plenty could have been done to make this revival unforgettable. Even the iconic pig-blood-splattering scene is wasted. Instead of actually dumping fake blood on *Carrie*, the director chooses a far-too-safe route and relies on a mere projection (to save time, money, and mess). Imagine how thrilling it would have been if real phony blood was used, and a little bit got intentionally splashed on audience members in the front row. The special effects should be expanded and used to make *Carrie* fun, but here they are almost nonexistent.

It is truly a shame that the creators of the theatrical adaptation decided to salvage their wounded egos by foolishly attempting to turn *Carrie* into the stage epic it will never be, instead of bringing in someone with fresh ideas and a sense of humor that could take the doomed musical and lampoon its shortcomings to madcap comic effect. Had *Carrie*'s originators used some imagination and irreverence like the creators of *SILENCE! The Musical*, they might have finally had a bona-fide hit.

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