



FLYING THE MUSICAL SKIES: Aaron Tveit (center) & the cast of the musical adaptation of *Catch Me If You Can*. Photo: Joan Marcus

Theater Review

Catch Me If You Can never quite takes off



CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

Book by Terrence McNally

Music by Mark Shaiman

Lyrics by Scott Wittman and Marc Shaiman

Choreography by Jerry Mitchell

Directed by Jack O'Brien

The Neil Simon Theatre

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By David NouNou

The mind-boggling question here is how does one expect to take a classic, multifaceted, fast-paced crime caper that is constantly on the move and turn it into a musical? The answer is, simple: You cannot, as the material does not lend itself to the stage-musical format. Instead, you get a dull, slow-paced, one-dimensional musical. Based on the brilliant 2002 Steven Spielberg movie of the same name with Leonardo DiCaprio and Tom Hanks, *Catch Me If You Can* chronicles the early life of Frank Abagnale, Jr., dropping out of high school at age 16 and, through different disguises, how he managed to forge over \$2 million dollars in fraudulent checks through various professions. The story made the film and what this young man achieved is an unforgettable and interesting experience. On the screen, it is a thrilling cat-and-mouse chase between Frank and his pursuer, Agent Carl Hanratty, much like Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, in which Inspector Javert is in endless pursuit of Jean Valjean, the thief. But then again, who would have ever dreamed or suspected back in the 1980s that *Les Miz*, as it became internationally known, could be turned into a stage musical and end up being one of the most successful musicals of all time, around the world?

The same creative team that fashioned John Waters' 1988 cult film *Hairspray* into a

wonderfully joyful, delirious musical with substance had the right material that lent itself to be turned into a Broadway musical and won eight Tony Awards, including Best Musical in 2003. (After all, Mr. Waters based *Hairspray* on a real-life TV dance show in Baltimore in the early 1960s.) Unfortunately for this show, there is no room for musical numbers and dance sequences. They look forced, silly, and out of place. Instead of moving the action forward, the songs bring it to a screeching halt. It becomes a "musical by the numbers": insert song here, insert dance number there, and the supposed production numbers feel even more out of place. The book by the venerable Terrence McNally tries to keep to the script of the movie, but somehow the dialogue here is trite and banal. The score by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman, both of whom did a brilliant job with *Hairspray*, is so unmemorable and forced. Even the songs that supposedly have the "razzle dazzle" are listless and cumbersome. The premise now is that Frank Jr. (Aaron Tveit) is recreating his life of crime, after the break-up of his parents as a made-for-TV extravaganza, replete with showgirls, singing and dancing. A bad idea from the onset.

There are a couple of bright things in the show and their names are Broadway veterans Norbert Leo Butz (Carl Hanratty) and Kerry Butler (Brenda Strong). Mr. Butz has been a savior to many a show. He was brilliant in last year's *Enron*, but unfortunately it closed way too prematurely. He is the one real thing here. His show-stopping number "Don't Break The Rules" is the one sparkling moment in the show. He actually is the oxygen to this choking musical. Ms. Butler (last seen on Broadway in her Tony-nominated role in *Xanadu*, and a brief stint in the hit jukebox musical *Rock of Ages*) does her earnest best to bring Brenda (Frank's girlfriend) to life. Unfortunately, she enters in the second act, but by then it is too late to resuscitate this moribund show. Mr. Tveit, extremely talented and attractive, has a good voice as he proved in *Next To Normal* in 2009. However, he plays Frank Jr. as a cute, one-dimensional character. He does not give the character any shading. In the movie, you rooted for Mr. DiCaprio's Frank to never be caught by the feds, but in this Broadway show, you are rooting for Mr. Butz's Hanratty to capture Frank and get the whole thing over with. Obviously, when one is rooting for the feds instead of the hero, the dynamics have changed and the powers-that-be should have known that something was terribly wrong here.

The tempo and energy that Jack O'Brien infused in his direction of *Hairspray* (he is certainly one of Broadway's best and most imaginative directors) is totally missing here. Instead of building the characters and overseeing the production to move swiftly, Mr. O'Brien just relied on Mr. Tveit's good looks to do the work. Mr. Tveit is even forced to disrobe gratuitously in two scenes. Adding further insult to injury is Jerry Mitchell's lackluster choreography, which is wooden and lifeless and slows down the proceedings even more. The talent and pedigree to bring in another smash hit was all here. However, the creators chose the wrong property to try their luck with,

and the final result is a tepid Broadway musical adaptation of *Catch Me If You Can*, an air-travel-themed thriller that never quite takes off.

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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

ORIGINAL MUSICALS



FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS: Aaron Tveit (center) and the leggy flight attendants of musical adaptation of *Catch Me If You Can*. Photo: Joan Marcus



CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

Believe it or not, I was really looking forward to *Catch Me If You Can* and wanted so much to love it or even like it, or at least be indifferent to it, because it is, after all, by the same creators who gave us the wonderful Broadway musical adaptation of John Waters' *Hairspray*. The difference is that *Hairspray* lent itself to be revamped into a stage musical, while *Catch Me* had no business being turned into one in the first place. With a sluggish book, unmemorable score, unimaginative direction, and sluggish, dull dancing, this musical is not the fast-paced, nonstop thrill-a-thon based on the 2002 Steven Spielberg movie of the same name. Musical numbers and dance sequences do not belong in a caper such as this, for they only bring things to a screeching halt.

Aaron Tveit as Frank Abagnale, Jr., is supposed to be the hero, but his lack of shading for such a

complex character is missing, and all we end up with is a handsome con artist with a winning smile. The real performer is Norbert Leo Butz as Carl Hanratty, the FBI agent in pursuit of Frank Jr., and Mr. Butz is the sole lifeline to the show. Whatever life the show has is due in large part to Mr. Butz. The sad part is the creative team consists of a very talented group of men. However, they made a poor choice in trying to adapt *Catch Me If You Can* into a Broadway musical.

NEIL SIMON THEATRE, 252 West 52nd Street, (212-239-6200).

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