



SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER: Eddie Korbich (standing center), Johnny Rabe (seated center) & company in *A Christmas Story, The Musical*. Photo: Carol Rosegg



Theater Review

A Christmas Story, The Musical

Stage adaptation of holiday favorite a surprise delight

A CHRISTMAS STORY, THE MUSICAL

Based on the film by Jean Shepherd, Leigh Brown & Bob Clark

Book by Joseph Robinette

Music and lyrics by Benj Pasek & Justin Paul

Choreography by Warren Carlyle

Directed by John Rando

Through December 30, 2012

Lunt-Fontanne Theatre

205 West 46th Street

(877-250-2929), www.AChristmasStoryTheMusical.com

By Scott Harrah

Stage adaptations of classic movies are tricky territory on Broadway, particularly holiday family fare, and perhaps that is why *A Christmas Story, The Musical* is a rare gem. This clever theatrical version of the beloved 1983 movie about the middle-class Parkers in Indiana circa 1940 works on so many levels, mostly as an energetic, nostalgic look back at the funny foibles many of us remember from Christmases long ago with our own families.

After gaining success last year on a road tour, ending with a critically acclaimed Chicago production, some questioned whether the show would gel with jaded New York audiences. This Broadway production should silence the naysayers, for here is the escapist, feel-good holiday show New York City and the entire tri-state area needs now as we all recover from the aftermath of Sandy.

Everything from the movie is here, including narrator Jean Shepherd (brilliantly played by TV and stage veteran Dan Lauria), fondly recalling a chilly December during his boyhood. The story, of course, centers on bespectacled Ralphie (the consistently charming Johnny Rabe) and his amusing campaign to convince his dad, the "Old Man" (John Bolton) and Mother (Erin Dilly), teacher Miss Shields (Caroline O'Connor) and the local department store Santa (Eddie Korbich) why he *must* have a Red Ryder BB Gun for Christmas.

Many of the iconic scenes in the film, from the father's tacky lady's fishnet -stocking leg lamp to the poor kid being "triple-dog-dared" into licking a frozen flagpole, have been transformed into razzle-dazzle production numbers here. The dad's lamp, won from a contest, is the focal point of the show-stopping

number “A Major Award,” featuring Mr. Bolton and an entire chorus line kicking in unison with the kitschy item.

Ralphie and his friends sing gleefully about the dangers of licking the flagpole in “Sticky Situation.” Even the class essay Ralphie writes about the BB gun, one of the film’s funnier moments, is turned into a delightful song, “You’ll Shoot Your Eye Out,” with his teacher and classmates. Benj Pasek and Justin Paul’s effervescent score captures all the humor of these scenes without coming across as overly silly or contrived, and that’s never an easy task in a stage adaptation of anything.

There are also some nice surprises, particularly the touching ballad “What a Mother Does,” sung with conviction by Ms. Dilly, who is magnificent as the protective mom Ralphie learns to appreciate as the show progresses.

Director John Rando keeps everything flowing at a perfect pace, from Ralphie’s visit to Santa at Higbee’s Department Store to the boy’s horror of having to put on the hideous pink bunny costume his aunt made, to hungry hound dogs that wreak havoc with the Christmas Dinner turkey. Somehow, Rando gets the children to actually be funny in all scenes, and that’s almost unprecedented in live theater.

It’s easy to see why the film *A Christmas Story* has become an American tradition, and the same thing rings true for this musical: It shows just how hilarious family squabbling truly is as long as there is genuine love in the home, whether it is a major holiday or any day of the year. There is nothing inherently sentimental or sappy about the show, but it manages to be both hilarious *and* poignant, making it the most delightful sleeper of the Broadway season. There are other holiday shows for families, but kids will definitely enjoy this one the most.

Edited by Scott Harrah

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