



RAINBOW LOWS & HIGHS (left to right) Elena Roger as Eva and Ricky Martin as Che in *Evita*.

Photo: Richard Termine



Theater Review

***Evita*: Strong revival resonates with classic score despite tepid Elena Rogers as Eva**

EVITA

Lyrics by Tim Rice

Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber

Choreography by Rob Ashford

Directed by Michael Grandage

Marquis Theatre

1535 Broadway

(800-745-3000), www.evitaonbroadway.com

By Scott Harrah

Three decades after it originally appeared on Broadway, *Evita* remains a classic. In fact, Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's seamless libretto and timeless score are so powerful that both hold up in this strong yet flawed revival, despite the odd casting of unknown Argentine actress Elena Roger as Eva Perón.

Ms. Roger has neither the stage presence nor the vocal ability and range to truly bring the ill-fated former First Lady of Argentina to theatrical life, but for some reason it almost does not matter because the songbook is so haunting. Pop star Ricky Martin's take on everyman Che is Latin-tinged in the right places, although he lacks the malevolent edge the character requires. Fortunately, stage veteran Michael Cerveris, as Juan Perón, is consistently superb and more than keeps the show afloat.

Max von Essex's tango singer Magaldi is also noteworthy in the soaring "On This Night of a Thousand Stars." While watching and hearing Rachel Potter, as Perón's mistress, beautifully sing "Another Suitcase in Another Hall," one wonders how much better this revival might have been with either Ms. Potter or any American leading lady cast as Eva. Perhaps it is difficult accepting Elena Roger's interpretation of Eva because we have Patti LuPone's iconic original Broadway performance and Madonna's sensitive Hollywood portrayal as the only frames of reference. Despite Ms. Roger's authentic Argentine accent, it is impossible for anyone who loves this show to overcome her pitchy, shrill vocals, particularly in such crucial Eva numbers as Act One's "Buenos Aires."

Ms. Roger is somewhat touching in the show's most famous song, "Don't Cry for Me Argentina," and her delivery of the somber lyrics should overwhelm the audience, but here she comes across as flat and devoid of any true emotion.

Michael Grandage directs everyone with fast timing and pacing, and does his best with the cast. Rob Ashford's choreography is true to the show's Argentine roots, with all the lavish tangos and swirling, high-kicking energy. Most of Christopher Oram's costumes are sets are incredible, but he puts Eva in some rather drab dresses, especially during the song "Rainbow High," when she is supposed to be in the finest couture during her tour of Europe.

Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice have been underappreciated in the United States for too long. *Evita* is one of their best and most accessible works: an English-language pop opera for the masses that even those who do not follow or enjoy opera can savor and appreciate. Who else but Mr. Lloyd Webber and Mr. Rice could take the tragic story of an Argentine president's wife and turn it into something so infectious and emotionally charged? For this reason alone, *Evita* is still one of most glorious Broadway revivals in years.

Published April 11, 2012

Reviewed at press performance on April 10, 2012

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