



HILARIOUS HARVEY: (left to right) Jim Parsons, Angela Parton, Jessica Hecht, Tracee Chimo in *Harvey*.
Photo: Joan Marcus

Theater Review

Harvey: Superb Jim Parsons anything but invisible



HARVEY

Written by Mary Chase

Directed by Scott Ellis

Through August 5, 2012

Roundabout Theatre at Studio 54

254 West 54th Street

(212-719-1300), www.RoundaboutTheatre.org

By David NouNou

Not often does a big TV personality or Hollywood star's acting style translate from one medium to another, especially when coming to Broadway. Having seen Jim Parsons on "The Big Bang Theory," I've admired his deadpan comic timing. Last year, he made a bold and impressive Broadway debut in the featured role of Tommy Boatwright in the brilliant, all-star revival of *The Normal Heart*.

Now, as Elwood P. Dowd in *Harvey*, he is absolutely sensational. After all, the show is a tad bit old-fashioned and only a star of Mr. Parsons' magnitude can propel backwards this show, for a bruised and jaded 21st century, to the more innocent times of 1944 when this play was written.

To take on a role that has been immortalized by James Stewart in the wonderful 1950 film version must have been daunting but, with Mr. Parsons' acute sense of comedic timing, angelic face, and unique innocence, he has reinvented Elwood P. Dowd as an amiable, delightful, charming, if a bit eccentric character that is believable for today's audiences, which is a formidable feat and beautifully achieved. His presence is so dynamic that, even in the creaky scenes he is not in, you can feel it.

For Harvey is a 6'3 ½" white rabbit or pooka (a spirit in Irish folklore) and can only be seen by Elwood. They go to bars together for a nip or two; Elwood always sets aside a seat for Harvey; they do most everything together. All this causes great consternation to Elwood's sister, Veta (Jessica Hecht) and

niece, Myrtle Mae (Tracee Chimo). For Elwood is an embarrassment to them and the society they want to travel in, so, thus, they commit him to a psychiatric home headed by the stuffy Dr. Chumley (the wonderful Charles Kimbrough). As in any comedy of that era, missteps occur and mayhem and confusion start the chain of events that take place, much to the audience's delight.

The show does have its weak moments, with subplots as they were prone to have in those days. These subplots or fillers were used to fill the space of a three-act play which tends to slow down the main proceedings. However, with Scott Ellis' sterling, crisp direction, one tends to overlook these moments and get right back into the thick of things.

Without Jim Parsons, there would be no reason to revive this relic. However, there are gems of performances by various members; the part of Veta, Elwood's sister, has usually been played by rotund women in a ditsy manner to add more humor to the scenes. Who would have thought that Jessica Hecht, who is usually cast in dramatic roles, could embody Veta to such hilarious results? She is a joy throughout especially during her hysterical scenes. TV and stage actor Charles Kimbrough plays his usual dry drollness to perfection, and Larry Bryggman as the family lawyer, is a true stage veteran that brings sincerity to each of his roles. Carol Kane plays the doctor's wife as her usual zany self.

There should be a standing rule on Broadway that, every year, both Jim Parsons and recent Tony winner Nina Arianda must make an annual New York stage appearance, for both of them are remarkable new theatre talents that imbue fresh insights into their roles and make their shows a must-see event. Memo to the Roundabout: picture Mr. Parsons and Ms. Arianda as George and Martha in a 2022 Diamond Jubilee of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Now there would be fireworks indeed and a revival worth staying around to see.

Edited by Scott Harrah

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