



'DAMNED' GOOD SHOW: (l to r) Kurt Robbins as Satan, Kenita R. Miller as Friendetta, and Jacob Hoffman as Louis Foster in *I'll Be Damned*. Photo: Carol Rosegg

Theater Review

Devilishly delightful *I'll Be Damned* is surprise feel-good musical

I'll Be Damned

Book by Rob Broadhurst & Brent Black

Music by Rob Broadhurst

Lyrics by Brent Black

Directed by April Nickell

The Vineyard Theatre

108 East 15th Street

(212-868-4444), www.Jaradoatheater.org

Through July 18, 2010

By David NouNou

Friends can and are made by the strangest situations or circumstances as demonstrated in the new musical *I'll Be Damned*, presented by the Jaradoa Theater Group. Broadhurst and Black have created a genuinely original, creative, entertaining and charming new musical about a young boy coming to terms with his life on his 19th birthday, which also happens to be his graduation day.

This is no ordinary boy. He is home schooled by his mother (Mary Testa). He is bright, intelligent, smart, kind, talented, unworldly, and friendless. In other words, a total geek. However, this boy is unique. Because of his good and untainted nature, he is God's favorite. More on that later. The boy, Louis Foster, as portrayed by Jacob Hoffman, is endearing and wonderful. He embodies all the elements of Louis' naiveté and personality. Being friendless, Louis has created a comic book, in which the heroine, Friendetta (Kenita R. Miller), finds friends for the friendless. On his 19th birthday, Louis throws himself a birthday party at the local roller rink. Louis has passed out fliers for all the people in his neighborhood to attend, and yes, you guessed it, no one shows up. He makes a fervent plea to the powers-that-be that he can find one lifelong friend of his own. His prayer is answered in the form of a divinely handsome man bearing a gift.

Unfortunately for Louis, the man bearing gifts happens to be Satan (Kurt Robbins). Louis makes the pact with the Devil, and sells his soul in search of a life-long friend. Hilarity ensues in their search for that perfect friend. Unfortunately, this search is fruitless, because each one of the candidates is even a bigger loser than Louis and, thus, Satan smites them dead. Satan ultimately brings Friendetta to life to find Louis that perfect friend, but her powers in the real world are futile.

This unholy alliance of Louis and Satan angers God (Gregory Treco). God feels betrayed and jealous that His favorite has signed his soul to the Devil, and that they have such a bond. This bond incurs the wrath of God, and as a retaliation, He brings on the rains to consume the earth. Yes, all this sounds very Faustian, contrived, and, at times, even cartoonish, but at its core, it is entertaining and has genuine heart. It is a tribute to all the lonely teenagers who may be geeks and grow up friendless, and have their mother as their best friend. Those are the ones that ultimately grow up to be stronger and learn to survive in the real world.

Although the score is not great, it is serviceable, and at times, the book may seem absurd. This musical is designed not just as a theater piece, but a wonderful homage to all the misfits that are out there, and that it's okay to be an outsider. The show is further enhanced by the marvelously talented performers in it, all of whom possess great voices. In addition to the wonderful Jacob Hoffman, there is Kurt Robbins who is devilishly handsome, with charm to spare, and who wouldn't want to make a pact with him? Kenita R. Miller as Friendetta is funny and hapless. Gregory Treco as God is refreshing, smug, and forgiving. Mary Testa is aptly shrewish as the mother. One can only hope that *I'll Be Damned* will have a longer run than as scheduled. It really deserves to be seen by as many people as possible.

Published July 10, 2010

Reviewed at Press Preview Performance on July 9, 2010

Copyright © July 10, 2010, StageZine.com