



TERRIFIC *TENOR*: (left to right) Jan Maxwell, Tony Shalhoub, Jay Klaitz in *Lend Me a Tenor*. Photo: Joan Marcus

Excellent cast, tight direction make *Lend Me A Tenor* a tour de farce

Lend Me A Tenor

Written by Ken Ludwig

Directed by Stanley Tucci

Music Box Theatre

239 West 45th Street

(212-239-6200), www.lendmeatenorbroadway.com

By David NouNou

It's hard to imagine that it has been more than two decades since the original opening of Ken Ludwig's *Lend Me A Tenor*, which starred Victor Garber and Philip Bosco in his Tony Award- winning performance. I am glad to say that this farce, despite its paper-thin plot, is a welcome addition to this or any other season. In large part kudos go out to its three leading men: Justin Bartha, Tony Shalhoub, and Anthony LaPaglia. Harder to imagine is that Shalhoub and LaPaglia, who are known for their dramatic roles on TV, along with Bartha, can be such natural farceurs and seem to be having such fun onstage. Their aim is to please, and they do so with aplomb.

The action takes place in 1934 in Cleveland in a hotel suite. Saunders (Shalhoub), the general manager of the Cleveland Opera Company and Max (Bartha) his assistant with operatic aspirations, are anxiously awaiting the arrival of the world- renowned tenor Tito Morrelli (LaPaglia), making his American debut in Cleveland, of all places. Morrelli has a penchant for adoring fans, women in particular, and his wine. Did I mention he is also married to the jealous, overbearing Maria who happens to be on the tour unexpectedly (played by the wonderful Jan Maxwell, in another winning performance)? To give Maria cause for her jealousy are Maggie, who happens to be Saunders' daughter (Mary Catherine Garrison) and Diana, the leading lady of the Company (Jennifer Laura Thompson), both of whom are anxious to meet and romance Morrelli. There is the delightful bellhop (Jay Klaitz) who adds to the mayhem.

Upon finally arriving to the suite, Morrelli and Maria have been verbally assaulting each other since their ride from the station, Saunders and Max have to quiet things down and make sure that Morrelli takes his nap and rest before the performance (of all things) of *Othello*. Maria makes him take his pills, and Max gives him his sedative. Morrelli is soon passed out cold. He is so out of it that Max and Saunders think Morrelli is dead. As previously noted, Max has operatic aspirations. As everyone knows, one *Othello* in makeup and costume is just like another. It would spoil the story to divulge any more of the madcap tomfoolery.

Farces are difficult to pull off. A lot of suspending disbelief must be expected. In order to make farces fully work, the cast has to be in perfect sync and harmony. Any hamming done has to be within the context of the play. It has to add to the elements of enjoyment without overtaking and overpowering the scenes. A strong director with a sophisticated sense of the absurd has to be in charge of such an arduous venture, and director Stanley Tucci, making his Broadway directorial debut, does a superb job here. He has fine-tuned his cast like a Swiss watch. Exact and precise, they run perfectly together, with sharp comic cohesion and timing. LaPaglia, Shalhoub, Bartha, and Maxwell, all of whom are outstanding in their roles, have taken lightweight fare and, with their hilarious performances and exquisite delivery of Ludwig's dialogue, turned this revival of *Lend Me a Tenor* into a marvelously entertaining tour de farce.

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TERRIFIC *TENOR*:
Anthony LaPaglia & Justin Bartha in *Lend Me a Tenor*.
Photo: Joan Marcus



LEND ME A TENOR

A great farce is always wonderful. However, Ken Ludwig's paper-thin *Lend Me a Tenor* is a superlative one, and it is a pleasure to have it back on Broadway after more than two decades. It has four excellent performances from Anthony LaPaglia, as opera singer Tito Morrelli, Jan Maxwell as his shrewish wife, Maria, Tony Shalhoub as the stage manager of an opera company in Cleveland, and Justin Bartha as Max, his assistant who has operatic aspirations. Madness ensues when the leading tenor cannot be awakened from a sound sleep, almost on the verge of death, and assistant Max is forced to perform the lead in *Othello*. There is the compulsory mistaken identity, costume changes, slamming in and out of doors, and all the elements of traditional farce. However, the four actors are such expert farceurs that they have taken mundane material and turned it into a breakneck, fast-paced comedy that is impossible to resist. Their aim is to please, and they do so with aplomb.

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