



COUNTRY-FRIED MUSICAL WITH A HEART: (left to right) Savannah Wise & Kyle Dean Massey in *Lucky Guy*. Photo: Joan Marcus

Theater Review

Lucky Guy: down-home, delightful fun



LUCKY GUY

Book, music, & lyrics by Willard Beckham

Directed by Willard Beckham

Little Shubert Theatre

422 West 42nd Street

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

By David NouNou

Despite the fact that Broadway is inundated with new musicals right now, *Lucky Guy* ranks among the better must-see shows this season, and it just happens to be Off-Broadway. It is fun, bright, energetic, and has a zesty score. The book is not too shabby, either; it is predictable but clever. Some of the current mediocrities on Broadway could learn a thing or two from this show. Come up with a fun idea, write a peppy score, fill it with talented people who can act, dance and have good singing voices, give it lavish production values, and you have just described *Lucky Guy*.

There are some shows in which the same person conceives, writes and directs, but the results can sometimes be disastrous. However, that is hardly the case with writer/director Willard Beckham, because *Lucky Guy* is a triumph. Mr. Beckham's premise is simple: an Oklahoma boy, Billy Ray Jackson (Kyle Dean Massey) writes a song, the song is winner of a contest, and he is brought to Nashville to record it. Along the way he meets the nice folks, G.C. Wright (Jim Newman) and Chicky Lay (Jenn Colella), who want to record his song. Of course, there are the villains: Big Al Wright (Leslie Jordan) and Miss Jeannie Jeannine (Varla Jean Merman) —the country songstress who hasn't had a hit in years—want to hoodwink our hero and confiscate his song. Also, Billy Ray meets and falls in love with Wanda Clark (Savannah Wise). There is no need to say more about the plot. Although the story is formulaic, there are many inventive touches to the show, good sets by Rob Bissinger, lovely costumes by William Ivey Long, and a chorus consisting of four talented, strapping cowpokes known as the Buckaroos: Callan Bergmann, Xavier Cano, Wes Hart, and Joshua Woodie.

Kyle Dean Massey has a beautiful country voice, acts well, and is a lovable cowboy in every sense.

Samantha Wise makes a winning ingénue; Jim Newman and Jenn Colella are perfect and charming as the hero's newfound friends. As the "villains," Leslie Jordan and Varla Jean Merman are both a high-camp riot. Mr. Jordan is a guilty pleasure, and an over-the-top delight in whatever he does, whether playing the lovably flamboyant Beverly Leslie on "Will & Grace" or himself in his amusing one-man show last year, *My Trip Down the Pink Carpet*. He never ceases to entertain.

Although the second act unravels slightly with some rather trite plot twists, it doesn't matter because *Lucky Guy* never tries to be anything but a humorous, down-home look at Nashville.

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