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## Theater: "Forbidden Broadway" Is Back and As Bitchy As Ever

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### FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: ALIVE & KICKING

\*\*\* out of \*\*\*\*

47TH ST. THEATRE

After three years away sharpening its claws and waiting for fresh meat like *Spiderman: Turn Off The Dark* and *Newsies* to appear, *Forbidden Broadway* is back with a revue that pokes delicious fun at the Great White Way.

It's an institution created by Gerard Alessandrini more than 30 years ago, one so beloved by the community it even won a special Tony Award. And somehow I never saw it. The same was true of the original *Fantasticks*,

which ran and ran and ran and ran and then it closed and I said, "Darn! I should have seen that!" (No, I haven't seen the revival either, though I imagine *Forbidden Broadway* had fun with that beloved musical playing at the Snapple Theatre.)

Happily, after hearing about it for all these years, *Forbidden Broadway: Alive & Kicking* is exactly what I expected: it takes wicked shots at some shows, highlights the foibles of actors who can't sing, bemoans the commercialization of Broadway, offers up amusing impersonations of famed stars but darn it, no matter how hard they try to be mean-spirited, their love of theater and the frustrating, egotistical, talented, wonderful people who put it on shines through.

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Was The Whole Donald

Before we get to the zingers, I'll say that Alessandrini is in fine form (though of course, I've nothing to compare it to). The ratio of hits to misses is strong and the overall creativity solid. It never became off the charts funny (except for a few moments) but it was never dull either. You don't need to have seen the shows to enjoy the parodies; indeed, as I'm certain many critics have said before, going to see *Forbidden Broadway* is probably a lot more fun than most of the new shows that come and go each season. Alessandrini wrote everything and directed alongside Phillip George. David Caldwell (the talent behind the promising musical *Gotta Getta Girl*) is back behind the piano as musical director.

The costumes by Philip Heckman and wigs by Bobbie Clifton Zlotnik are inventive on a dime (and maybe the cast is all alone backstage, but if someone is helping them quick change from one outfit to the next, they are probably the hardest working person there). All four cast members are game and genial, but it must be said that the women outshine the men throughout and Jenny Lee Stern shines brightest (though [Natalie Charle Ellis](#) came on strong in the second act).

Most Broadway performers can probably enjoy the gentle and not-so-gentle ribbing of *Forbidden Broadway* but I doubt the vocally challenged Elena Roger of *Evita* will be stopping by anytime soon. Stern is hilarious here, though the target is such a slam dunk (Roger literally couldn't sing her role and seemed to disappear even when onstage for minutes at a time) that Alessandrini couldn't have missed with this one if he tried. No wonder it's the first dart tossed; knowing that the tune "Buenos Aires" repeats over and over that *Evita* has "star quality" (the very thing Roger lacks) makes this almost too easy. But what puts it over is Stern's hilarious enunciation of every lyric, though [Marcus Stevens](#) sets the tone for the guys by being an amiable but soft-focused Ricky Martin, goofy a la most improv but not quite dead-on.

He does better teasing Matthew Broderick for barely being able to dance in a musical (back surgery didn't help) and here Marcus does a terrific vocal zinger on Broderick's speaking voice.

A spoof on *Annie* called *Granny* doesn't really land (okay, so it's a 35 year old musical; so what?), but like every other number here, it's put over with energy and is soon over: more than 20 shows (and a TV show) get spoofed here in under two hours (including an intermission) so in the tradition of the Borscht Belt, if you don't like a joke, just wait a minute and another one will be along soon to take its place.

The mocking of the serious *Once* (my favorite musical of last year) was fun, with star Steve Kazee's singing another example of finding an actor's quirk and exploiting it for amusement; it's a highlight of [Scott Richard Foster's](#) night. That was followed by Ellis and her broad vocal range used to marvelous effect in "Feed The 'Burbs," a naughty spin on *Mary Poppins* and the tourist trade. Ellis was even better in another highlight, the full-on hilarious sketch surrounding *Porgy & Bess* (I mean, *The Gershwin's Porgy & Bess*), with Ellis spot-on doing Audra McDonald both vocally and as an actress.

There were lulls too: the finale involved *The Book Of Mormon* but I don't think Alessandrini cracked that code yet; the *South Park* guys clearly mock themselves along with everyone else and the idea that they disdain Broadway and its traditions doesn't fly (especially since one of the songs the show spoofs -- "I Believe" -- is itself a loving send-up of "I Have Confidence" from *The Sound Of Music*).

But no matter. The evening is fun and breezy and the temptation to return in six months or a year and see what they're teasing next is understandable. Especially if [Jenny Lee Stern](#) is still in the show. She does an hilarious Patti LuPone (alongside Stevens as Mandy Patinkin), nails *The Jersey Boys*, Bernadette Peters and pretty much everyone else in her path. *Saturday Night Live* should jump on her talents right away.

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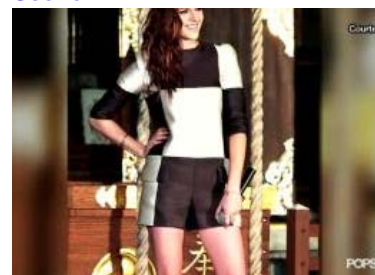
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**Note:** Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review.

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### Fern Siegel: Stage Door: *Forbidden Broadway*

There is cause for celebration -- after a three-year hiatus, *Forbidden Broadway* is back. One can almost hear strands of Gypsy in the background: "You'll be swell, you'll be great." And it is. Proving you can't keep a good parody down, "Like Jesus and Judy, we're resurrected."

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