

Theater: *Yank!* Kickstarter; *Cheaters Club* Stopper

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YANK! THE MUSICAL *** 1/2 out of ****
THE CHEATERS CLUB * out of ****

YANK! THE MUSICAL *** 1/2 out of ****
KICKSTARTER CAMPAIGN

I first saw *Yank!* in a tiny theater off off (off off) Broadway in Brooklyn back in 2007. **It was so good** (and its star, future Tony winner-to-be Bobby Steggert so appealing), you just knew it would be staged again. Indeed. This story about a gay soldier who falls in love during WW II has simply become better and better as it's been performed around the country, culminating in an acclaimed Off Broadway run in 2010. A bruited transfer to Broadway sadly fell through but now the show's creators hope to ensure a long life for their work by recording the all-important cast album. Hence a Kickstarter campaign which ends early Friday morning and is just a smidge away from success.

A cast album is vital to a show like this. It's the best way for people who didn't get to see *Yank!* to fall in love. It preserves the performances of the original talent and it will spur more productions for years to come. This is a labor of love, of course, but it's also a very entertaining and well-made show that deserves your support. Anyone who has seen the show will surely step up. (**Here's a page devoted to reviews from its various incarnations.**) If you haven't, you can learn about it and hear a bunch of songs at the show's website.

And that Kickstarter campaign. This is one Kickstarter campaign that will really make a difference for the future of this show. It's not just an easy way for some Hollywood celeb to raise funds for a pet project; it's a lifeline for a very good musical that deserves to be seen again and again.

I'd love to see Steggert in this role again. (Instead, **he'll be on Broadway this spring playing the lead in the musical *Big Fish*.**) But even if I do some day soon, I'd still want the cast album as well.

THE CHEATERS CLUB * out of ****
ABRONS ART CENTER

The Amoralists is an ambitious theater company that proudly touted several productions of the last few months as "the summer of the Amoralists." That sounds like something you could support, especially after their production of *Rantoul And Die* received some strong reviews.

And what could be more amoral than the story of several siblings and a friend who abscond to Savannah for a weekend of debauchery away from their spouses, an annual event to purge themselves of their wicked, wicked desires? That's the premise -- sort of -- for *The Cheaters Club*, but it turns out the most amoral thing happening is the waste of talent.

Written and directed poorly by Derek Ahonen, the first act is a laborious set-up. You get a framing device in which an out of work actor tells tourists about the haunted night that occurs once every 333 years when spirits can take over a human body. Then we have the broadly lampooned, would-be adulterers who explain what they're up to, check into the most haunted hotel in Savannah and have some drinks at the odd little bar featuring a drunken nun, a kooky character, an easily offended bartender, a slatternly singer and a silent piano player.

Turns out all of this is utterly unimportant since the real focus of the play is actually on the people running the hotel. The proprietress in particular wants a warm body so she can bring back the spirit of her dead lover, a lover who is dead because she killed him in a fit of pique.

So the first act is intentionally played at a broad, sketch comedy level, setting up the stories of all these cheaters who aren't even really what the play is about. The more serious and more exhausting second act focuses on the elaborate scheme to bring back spirits, with the cheaters all but forgotten. We're told again and again what is happening even though we've had no trouble figuring it out the first time. The labored humor of the first act somehow becomes a dim, happy memory since at least they were trying to be entertaining. It's all so ineffective that when one of the siblings returned to the bar after a lengthy, unnecessary absence I was jolted because I had entirely forgotten she was in the show. That happened again after the show was finally over -- but it wasn't, because I'd forgotten about the completely unnecessary framing device of the out of work actor and the tourists, which was reprised so we could be told again what we had just seen.

Literally dozens of people crowded the stage (26 in all) of the rather attractive theater at the Abrons Art Center, which has the happy feel of a high school auditorium. The set by Alfred Schatz was solidly impressive and did a good job creating the context for everything from goofy comedy to supernatural chills. Also credit the lighting of Brad Peterson. Among the actors, you have to admire those who manage to create something out of such dire circumstances. Zen Mansley has the proper, ripe overacting tone for this foolishness when playing the tour guide/unemployed actor. He gets more laughs by playing it seriously than most of the actors do by playing it for laughs. Sarah Lemp as the scheming hotel owner also creates the most believable character (and most consistent accent). Jordan Tisdale also scores nicely in the dual role of a nerdy cheater and then -- when possessed -- a very different man altogether.

Simply making such an elaborate play happen is an accomplishment in itself and there's clearly talent involved onstage and behind. Here's hoping the fall or winter or spring of the Amoralists will be more rewarding than this final offering of their summer.

THE THEATER OF 2013 (on a four star scale)

The Other Place ** 1/2
Picnic * 1/2
Opus No. 7 ** 1/2
Deceit * 1/2
Life And Times Episodes 1-4 **
Cat On A Hot Tin Roof (w Scarlett Johansson) * 1/2
The Jammer ***
Blood Play ** 1/2
Manilow On Broadway ** 1/2
Women Of Will ** 1/2
All In The Timing ***
Isaac's Eye ***
Bunnica: A Rabbit Tale Of Musical Mystery ** 1/2
The Mnemonist Of Dutchess County * 1/2
Much Ado About Nothing ***
Really Really *
Parsifal at the Met *** 1/2
The Madrid * 1/2
The Wild Bride at St. Ann's ** 1/2
Passion at CSC *** 1/2
Carousel at Lincoln Center ***
The Revisionist **
Rodgers & Hammerstein's Cinderella ***
Rock Of Ages * 1/2
Ann ** 1/2

Old Hats ***
The Flick ***
Detroit '67 ** 1/2
Howling Hilda reading * (Mary Testa ***)
Hit The Wall *
Breakfast At Tiffany's * 1/2
The Mound Builders at Signature *
Vanya And Sonia And Masha And Spike *** 1/2
Cirque Du Soleil's Totem ***
The Lying Lesson * 1/2
Hands On A Hardbody *
Kinky Boots **
Matilda The Musical *** 1/2
The Rascals: Once Upon A Dream ***
Motown: The Musical **
La Ruta ** 1/2
The Big Knife *
The Nance ***
The Assembled Parties ** 1/2
Jekyll & Hyde * 1/2
Thoroughly Modern Millie ** 1/2
Macbeth w Alan Cumming *
Orphans ** 1/2
The Testament Of Mary ** 1/2
The Drawer Boy **
The Trip To Bountiful ***
I'll Eat You Last ** 1/2
Pippin *
This Side Of Neverland ***
A Public Reading Of An Unproduced Screenplay About The Death Of Walt Disney ***
Natasha, Pierre And The Great Comet Of 1812 ***
Colin Quinn Unconstitutional ** 1/2
A Family For All Occasions *
The Weir *** 1/2
Disney's The Little Mermaid **
Far From Heaven **
The Caucasian Chalk Circle **
Somewhere Fun **
Venice no stars
Reasons To Be Happy **
STePz *** 1/2
The Comedy of Errors (Shakespeare In The Park) ***
Roadkill ** 1/2
Forever Tango ***
Monkey: Journey To The West ** 1/2
The Civilians: Be The Death Of Me ***
NYMF: Swiss Family Robinson **
NYMF: Dizzy Miss Lizzie's Roadside Revue Presents The Brontes * 1/2
NYMF: Mata Hari in 8 Bullets ***
NYMF: Life Could Be A Dream **
NYMF: Mother Divine **
NYMF: Julian Po ** 1/2
NYMF: Marry Harry **
NYMF: Gary Goldfarb: Master Escapist ** 1/2
NYMF: Castle Walk ***
NYMF: Crossing Swords ***
NYMF: Bend In The Road *** 1/2
NYMF: Homo The Musical no stars
NYMF: Volleygirls *** 1/2
Murder For Two **
Let it Be **
The Cheaters Club *

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Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review. All productions are in New York City unless otherwise

indicated.

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