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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
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Yank! WW II Musical Is A Real Find

Going to any play or musical Off Broadway or Off Off Broadway is always a risk. Most of the time, when you're checking out a new work that doesn't have the stamp of approval of being acclaimed in London or major artists attached, you're in for a bumpy night. This is especially true if you're going to a gay-themed play. Since I write for *The Advocate*, I check out those works even more frequently than most and therefore I see a lot more bad gay plays than other types. So being inherently interested in the subject matter doesn't make you easier on them; it makes you a lot harder. (I assume the same is true for people who regularly attend plays by or about blacks, Latinos, Asians, etc. They've seen every cliché a million times before.)

So despite some friendly reviews from theater websites, my expectations were low when heading to Park Slope in Brooklyn to see a new musical, "Yank!" about gay soldiers in World War II by two brothers, Joseph and David Zellnick. The bare bones "set" -- no set to speak of -- didn't inspire confidence either. So what a delightful surprise to say that the show is entertaining as it is, could easily get better and deserves a future life Off Broadway.

The discovery of a journal in an antique store in San Francisco bookends the story of wide-eyed Stu (a very charming Bobby Steggert) joining the Army after Pearl Harbor and finding himself drawn to Mitch (Maxime de Toledo), another grunt who is so strapping his nickname is "Hollywood." (Stu's nickname becomes a play on "light in the loafers," though the guys in his squad don't really think that.) They go through the stress of basic training, Stu finds fellow travelers in the steno pool and gets recruited for "Yank!" magazine by a more defiantly open gay man who takes Stu under his wing. Misunderstandings, witch hunts, a supportive lesbian in the upper ranks and Iwo Jima all come into play during the two and a half hour show (including intermission).

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