

Broadway Bullet Blog  
Wednesday, October 3, 2007  
Going Down Swingin'

Going Down Swingin' is, quality-wise, the best show of the festival so far. Though it may not be my favorite (as those spots generally go to the flawed underdogs – what can I say, I'm a sucker for musicals that need work), there's not a single song or plot point that needs cutting or expanding. It all works perfectly.  
... I feel really weird writing that.

An adaptation of the opera Don Giovanni set in the dying days of radio, Going Down Swingin' takes you through a rehearsal of The Liberty Cigarettes Dean Newhouse Variety Hour, then the live airing of a show a week later. It's probably not a spoiler to tell you that things don't go all that well for Dean – in a tragedy a character used to getting what they want simply won't. And it's not hard to see why Christopher Shyer took a few days off from starring in Mamma Mia! to play Dean. His portrayal is a far cry from Sam, who is by necessity drowned out by ABBA songs – Dean is charming yet sinister, and Shyer's subtle and slow realization that his whole world is crumbling around him is both satisfying and devastating to watch.

I'd heard most of the score before, as they sang a full six songs at the D-Lounge event in late August, but while out of context the songs lacked personality, in the show they were presented as glorious pieces of irony. Almost all sung within the context of the radio program, they seem to be plucked straight out of the era – some added some levity to a heavy show, some enhanced the drama, all worked beautifully. Without a song list I'll have a hard time listing favorites, but I particularly loved Meredith Patterson's 11 o'clock rendition of "Sorry, My Dear" and Maria Schaffel's stunning farewell in "He Thrills Me." The radio program itself provides numerous hilarious moments – shows like "Our Boy Harry" (starring 28-year-old Max Meadows, brilliantly played by Spamalot star Tim Deckman, as 16-year-old Harry) and "The Trials of Constance" (about a 30-year-old spinster trying to find love in her waning years) are played to their full potential, and the constant plugs for Liberty Cigarettes are side-splitting.

I suppose my only qualm with the show is that as a constant checker of the NYMF website when cast lists were being finalized, I noticed them listing one Colin Hanlon as playing Oscar Van Zandt for a week or so – I mean no slight against Leo Ash Evens, but it's simply not fair to tease me with one of my favorite actors then yank that away.