

Backstage

Going Down Swingin' (The Don Giovanni Radio Hour)

September 25, 2007

By Lisa Jo Sagolla

If only the story line was more compelling, the savvy new musical *Going Down Swingin' (The Don Giovanni Radio Hour)* would be a thoroughly scrumptious affair. With music by Peter Hilliard, words by Matt Boresi, and direction by Jenny Lord, the show concerns an abusive, hard-drinking, pill-popping, womanizing crooner who hosts a once-popular radio variety show that is fast declining due to the rise of television.

Set in 1956, the tail end of old-time radio's golden age, *Going Down Swingin'* takes tremendous advantage of opportunities to comment on the offensiveness of the racial and gender stereotypes promulgated in the popular entertainment of the era. The musical also features catchy period tunes that capture the bristling rivalry between swing-style jazz and blues and the period's burgeoning rock 'n' roll sensibilities.

But best of all are the show's very affectionate parodies of old-time-radio detective dramas, soap operas, comedy teams, musical programs, and product commercials. With an onstage sound-effects man seated down right -- with all his noisemaking paraphernalia -- a musical combo in the upstage-left corner, and actors standing at music stands reading from scripts, the presentation of the radio shows within the show are genuinely amusing as realistic examples of the genre, never once straying into overexaggerated mimicry. The style of parody is subtle and insightful.

Fortunately, much of *Going Down Swingin'*, including virtually the entire second act, involves either the rehearsing or performing of the radio-show re-creations. The musical's book scenes -- which revolve around the personal lives of the crooner and the performers on his show -- are predictably melodramatic.

Often outshining the dramatic material, the show's entire cast sizzles. As the despised crooner, Christopher Shyer exudes

perfectly oily charm. Meredith Patterson makes an alluring torch singer, and Tom Deckman is hilarious as the "teen" comedy star who's now 30 years old.

Presented by Beth Morrison Projects and New Sounds Theatre as part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival

at TBG Theater, 312 W. 36th St., 3rd floor, NYC.

Sept. 24–Oct. 6. Remaining performances: Sun., Sept. 30, 8 p.m.; Mon., Oct. 1, 1 p.m.; Tue., Oct. 2, 1 p.m.; Fri., Oct. 5, 1 and 11 p.m.; Sat., Oct. 6, 8 p.m.

(212) 352–3101 or (866) 811–4111 or www.theatremania.com or www.nymf.org.

Casting by Paul Davis and Geoff Josselson.

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