

STAGESCENELA

Tuesday, July 1, 2008

WOW!

AMERICAN TALES

American Tales is a pair of absolutely charming one-act chamber musicals inspired by Mark Twain's "The Loves of Alonzo Fitz Clarence and Rosannah Ethelton" and Herman Melville's "Bartleby The Scrivener," Composer Jon Powell has written a bunch of highly melodic tunes f, Ken Stone's book and lyrics are clever and sweetly funny, and Kay Cole and Thor Steingraber direct with delicacy and imagination. Daniel Blinkoff's charming naivete is an absolute delight to watch. Devon Sorvari is the picture of loveliness and does a delightfully boyish turnabout in Melville's tale. Raphael Sbarge is comically villainous in Act 1 and in Act 2 sweetly gloomy. American Tales provides one of the most charming evenings of musical theater you're likely to find this year.

The full review:

The Anateus Company opens its 2008 ClassicsFest series (of 8 works in progress and 6 "first looks") with a world premiere fully staged production of a pair of absolutely charming one-act chamber musicals, billed together as American Tales.

American Tales is comprised of Mark Twain's "The Loves of Alonzo Fitz Clarence and Rosannah Ethelton" and Herman Melville's "Bartleby The Scrivener," both featuring music by Jan Powell, book and lyrics by Ken Stone, and direction by Kay Cole and Thor Steingraber.

Twain's tale is being touted as the first story of two people falling in love with the aid of technology, in this case the still infant telephone.

When a misdialled number puts Alonzo (Daniel Blinkoff) in contact, not with his Aunt Susan, but with an angelic-voiced stranger named Rosanna (Devon Sorvari), it is love at first hearing for both him and the party at the other end of the line as they join voices in "Rosannah's Song," their phones held close to their hearts. Unfortunately, Alonzo and Rosannah live on opposite sides of 1890s America, he in Eastport, Maine and she in San Francisco.

Not only distance gets in the way of true love but also the appearance of the dastardly fortune hunter Burley (Raphael Sbarge). Despite the bouquet of flowers he brings to Rosannah, we know Burley to be a villain from the first notes of "dum dum dum dum DUM ... dum-dum-dum-dum." Though Rosannah rejects him repeatedly, Burley is a man who will not take no for an answer:

Rosannah: When I am in need of more plainness, I will call you.

Burley: She loves me!!!

Still, it is Alonzo who has captured Rosannah's heart, even though his medium stature does not match the 6'2" (at the very least) that she imagines him to be, just as Alonzo has fallen head over heels for Rosannah, despite her blond locks' not matching the picture of ebony curls he sees in his mind's eye.

When Burley learns of his long distance competition, he has no choice but to journey to Maine, disguised as a French inventor, in order to throw a wrench in Rosannah and Alonzo's budding relationship and then ...

Act 2 is the darker (yet still frequently comic) tale of the scrivener who would prefer not to scriven? Scrive? Scriv?

Set in the pre-Xerox 1890s New York, "Bartleby the Scrivener" (Sbarge) is the newest law firm employee hired to copy documents at 4 cents per 100 words, joining fellow scriveners Turkey (John Combs) and Nippers (Blinkoff) and young messenger Ginger Nut (Sorvari). (Only Bartleby escapes being cleverly nicknamed.)