



Raleigh

BWW Reviews: Theatre Raleigh Shines with PARADE

by

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I'm going to cut to the chase, because I want everyone who reads this to come away with this: Theatre Raleigh's *Parade* is not something you can afford to miss, so buy your ticket now.

Parade is based on the true story of Leo Frank, a Jewish man who relocated from Brooklyn to Atlanta, Georgia. Raleigh audiences will particularly appreciate his observation that "being Southern's not just being in the South." Frank was a factory superintendent, and when a young girl in his

employ is tragically murdered in the factory, Frank is framed as her killer. With a score by [Jason Robert Brown](#) and a book by [Alfred Uhry](#), *Parade* premiered on Broadway in 1998. This production is its Triangle regional premiere.

The cast of actors is top-notch. With the brief exception of a few dropped accents here and there, the talented group brings the story to life in charming and emotional ways. Brown is, in this writer's humble opinion, one of the most talented composers of this generation, and his sophisticated score demands that the performers bring their A-game, and these actors absolutely do. This review could be a litany extolling the virtues of each cast member, but I'll stick to some real standouts. Young actress Carly Grissom makes quite an impression as murder victim Mary Phagan. Though a high school student, Ms. Grissom has the poise and presence of seasoned performers twice her age. [Maurice Johnson](#) somehow manages to make one of the least likable characters in the story, Jim Conely, charming enough that you'll feel conflicted about hating him. [Mr. Johnson's](#) singing features that special something that can't be taught; his rendition of "That's What He Said" is one you won't soon forget. As Leo's overwhelmed but devoted wife Lucille, [Lauren Kennedy](#) adds powerhouse vocals and skillful

acting to the show. Her voice fills every nook and cranny of that theater, and then some. Ms. Kennedy's tender understanding of Lucille reflects an emotional attachment to the story which resonates most powerfully during "You Don't Know This Man." Most impressive of all, though, is leading man Zachary Prince as Leo Frank. He simply *is* Leo Frank. His voice is smooth, tender, and powerful, and his performance will linger in the audience's hearts for a long time to come. Mr. Prince's performance is, without a doubt, one of the best that the Triangle has seen in years.

Though the space is relatively small, the direction (by Eric Woodall) and scenic design (by Chris Bernier) manage to fill the space without crowding it. The production uses about a dozen chairs, two benches, a pair of tables, two set pieces resembling prison bars, a geometric tree-like structure, a few props, and inventive audience seating to bring the show to life. It is minimalist design at its finest: it allows the space to truly become those places by providing just enough details to trust that the audience can fill in the rest, proving that bigger is not always better. Plenty of little touches add to the dynamic use of space - one notable such event is the lighting decision to make the audience become the courthouse attendees for Leo's trial. Without breaking the fourth wall, the production is able to include the audience in a way that simply wouldn't work in a bigger space. The entire creative team did a masterful job of using the space to their utmost advantage.

Hot Summer Nights | Theatre Raleigh has something really special on their hands - don't miss this gem! *Parade* runs through July 27. For tickets and more information, visit www.theatreraleigh.com.

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