

Review of Here I'll Stay: Kurt Weill in America

"Informative frolics with great songs"

by Ruth O'Reilly for remotegoat on 16/07/09

Factual and fun, 'Here I'll Stay' is an interesting way to journey through Kurt Weill's musical life. Essentially a collection of his songs, this production relays Weill's passage to America and his success there. The script (and narration) by Peter Scott-Presland contains enough information to guide the complete novice, though enough wit to avoid getting too bogged down in the beloved topic of Weill's musical duality. Littered with quotes from the press of the time along with photographic projections, you start to get a real feel for Weill's era. The directors (Scott-Presland and Rachel Heyburn) make good use of what little space this theatre offers. Accents replace costume changes and (though sometimes questionable!) do a good job of distinguishing between various characters.

But we're really here for the music and the star of the show is Weill. The first half shows a good variety of songs and interestingly compares lyrically different versions of the same score. 'Knickerbocker Holiday' is a good ensemble piece but we soon see musical student Johannah Jolson become the strongest force in the cast. Weill's music requires strength of voice, musicality, acting ability and some good old fashioned thigh slapping, all of which Jolson has. Gary Hughes must also be recognised for his talented voice and he performs all his songs with energy and style. All of this is of course impossible without the delightful subtle tones of pianist David Harrod who has the most relentless job of all.

After the interval we are invited to the 'show-casing' of Alan Jay Lerner's 'Love Life', which gives us a chance in which to sit back and enjoy a short musical show. This is a well-chosen, poignant yet funny piece, and is still very relevant to us today. Overall, Scott-Presland captures the essence of Weill's music and I would be interested to see what he could come up with, if given the space and budget. But for now, with a little imagination, you will still get a good night out. Get there in time for a pre-show drink in the downstairs pub, enjoy a few laughs, some great singing and celebrate Weill for the great composer he is.