

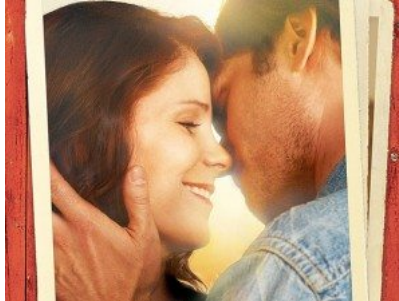

THEATER

April 7, 2014

Theater Review (<https://stagebuddy.com/category/theater/theater-review>)

SEE or SKIP: The Bridges of Madison County

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In this arts column, rather than provide a lengthy critique, we hit the bullet points and share our thoughts on whether a show is worth seeing or skipping. Of course, your own reasons for picking or ignoring a show might be based on price, time, discounts, availability, subject interest, word of mouth and personal taste. Feel free to add our voice to the chorus.

SHOW: The Bridges of Madison County

VENUE: Gerald Schoenfeld Theater

VENUE TYPE: Broadway

SEE because:

Kelli O'Hara is one of the reigning goddesses of Broadway. She sings with great range and beauty and is touching as a housewife who blossoms from a brief love affair.

O'Hara's physical transformation from nondescript housewife to alluring beauty (complete with all-to-brief and vaguely gratuitous nude scene) is something to see – especially for all the husbands in the audience dragged to the show by their "Shades of Grey"-toting wives.

For the women: co-lead Steven Pasquale is an appealing hippie-hunk who does take his shirt off at one point.

Some of the music is lovely. It has a folksy lilt, and the lyrics are intelligent without trying to be clever.

The story is told quietly, with a lot of time for the relationship between housewife and photographer to build naturally.

Next-door neighbors Cass Morgan and Michael X. Martin have a good scene that lends much-needed comic relief to the second act.

The last song, "Always Better," is damn good.

SKIP because:

Oh my God, this thing runs two hours and 40 minutes with an intermission and you feel pretty much every minute of it.

Considering all the time we spend with Francesca and Robert, their great love isn't nearly as touching or captivating as it ought to be.

Throughout the piece, friends and neighbors constantly watch, pry, spy and loom ominously – and yet, not a thing is made of that plotwise.

The romance between Robert and Francesca is simply not enough to fill a two-act Broadway musical without subplots and minor characters who connect the themes. After all, composer-lyricist Jason Robert Brown previously covered five years in 80 minutes. Now it's taking him 160 minutes just to get through half a week.

Nice as much of the music is, there's a sameness to it, and when it finally does become rousing, it's in the way of typical modern Broadway ballads: louder, more intensely sung, but still earwasy.

There's just something flat and a mite tedious about the whole enterprise. In trying to steer clear of clichés and outsized Broadway-musical tropes, Brown and librettist Marsha Norman go too far in the other direction and swamp us with the ordinary.

FINAL CALL: **SKIP**, because:

It's a tasteful slog but a slog nonetheless.

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