

CABARET SCENES

June 2009

THE TOXIC AVENGER

New World Stages, NYC, Apr. 25, 2009



The Toxic Avenger is the kind of musical one wants to love—because parts of it are quite funny and quite clever in a quirky, offbeat way. And it gets off to a strong start. But this show—which recently transferred to Off-Broadway after having its world premiere at New Jersey’s George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick—runs along rather bumpily. There are some perfectly realized moments, but also some dull ones. Its sense of whimsy in its best moments reminded me of *Bat Boy* and *Urinetown*. But those musicals were strong in all departments; *The Toxic Avenger* is a mixed success.

John Rando, who also directed *Urinetown*, makes the most of the material. Joe DiPietro’s book has plenty of laughs. David Bryan’s bombastic music, however, bored me. The score needs more variety, more memorable melodies. Sara Chase is an absolute delight as the female lead. Hers is an utterly delicious performance—one of my favorite musical comedy performances of the season. Nancy Opel carries off several roles with her customary verve—even performing a duet with herself. Nick Cordero, in the title role, is pleasant, but that isn’t enough for the show’s biggest role.

The Toxic Avenger is more like a cheap comic book than a great novel; but even a cheap comic book can be satisfying sometimes. And it’s good seeing a colorful (if flawed) new musical opening in these economically challenged times. The George Street Playhouse has a good track record as an incubator of shows, having launched *Proof* and *The Spitfire Grill*, among others. And they’re currently trying out a new play by Arthur Laurents, *New Year’s Eve*, that is more interesting than most plays now running in New York; if it doesn’t transfer to New York, there’s no justice.

— Chip Deffaa