

Theater Review: Americana of 'The Music Man' is Revived at Chicago's Goodman Theatre

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 9, 2019 - 11:21am

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CHICAGO – Professor Harold Hill has come back to River City, and that means trouble right here. Meredith Willson's "The Music Man" is now in major revival at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago... and its satiric view of small town life in Iowa still provides some fun illumination. Directed by Tony Award winning director Mary Zimmerman, the play was just extended to August 18th, 2019, at various times. For more information and tickets, [click here](#) [19].



Play Rating: **4.0/5.0**

The straightforward adaptation of the story a con artist traveling salesman first saw the lights of Broadway in 1957, on its way to a four year run. The Goodman version doesn't try to reinvent the the show (surprisingly) and the coy optimism and gentle humor evokes a different time in America. The ensemble cast, led by Geoff Packard as the Professor, handles the 2 hour and 15 minute show with a languid grace, and the open stage scenery provides the Iowa space. Add classic songs like "76 Trombones," "Til There Was You" and "Goodnight My Someone," and a legendary American musical theater form comes alive.



Leading the Big Parade: The Cast of Goodman Theatre's 'The Music Man'

Photo credit: Liz Lauren for the Goodman Theatre

A train full of traveling salesmen pulls into River City, Iowa, and one such flim-flam man, Harold Hill (Geoff Packard), comes up with a way to sell instruments and band uniforms to the rubes. He asserts that River City’s newly installed pool table is corrupting the youth, and the townspeople go along with him, except the skeptical Marian the Librarian (Monica West). She keeps Hill at arm’s length, until his salesman charm begins to win her over. Meanwhile, Mayor Shinn (Ron E. Rains) is out to prove that Professor Hill has no credentials.

That’s pretty much it, and the comedy/music elements spring from that small town simplicity. Meredith Willson wrote the music, lyrics and book (with Franklin Lacey) and 40 drafts later had his legacy. Most of the songs have become standards, either through viewings of the 1961 film adaptation or just multiple recordings of each song. The highlight is the bright “76 Trombones,” performed with deserved gusto by the Goodman ensemble (choreography by Denis Jones). It embodies the hope of what can be, a parade of instruments and marchers becoming the stars of their home town.

There is a love story in a sense, between Hill and Marian, but with so much going on it was hard to create the emotional bridge in the story. Geoff Packard and Monica West had great singing chops and technical skill, but the chemistry was lacking. Not that it mattered. The story is really about the reformation of Hill, and the relationship is part of that transition. That pairing did, however, produce the iconic standards “Goodnight My Someone” and “Til There was You.”



Shipooi! Marian (Monica West) and Harold Hill (Geoff Packard) in ‘The Music Man’

Photo credit: Liz Lauren for the Goodman Theatre

The rousing post-intermission number was the “Shipooi” dance, featuring the whole cast blasting through a fun piece of corny stage craft that had the sold-out audience cheering at the end. Less successful was the “Marian the Librarian” scene, which absolutely kills in the movie but couldn’t conquer its limited space at the Goodman. The song “Gary, Indiana” made me wonder where was the song performed closest to the actual Gary (30 miles from the theatre), but not in the town. I’m guessing there was a high school performance at Highland High. Look it up.

With the recent Lyric Opera’s “West Side Story” and Goodman’s “The Music Man,” it’s a good time in Chicago for Broadway revivals from 1957. These classics of musical theater continue to express their freshness, bridging the time gap but always leaving us wanting more. “Shipooi, shipooi, shipooi/The girl who’s hard to get...”

The Goodman Theatre. presents “The Music Man” in both matinees and evening performances through August 18th, 2019, at 170 North Dearborn, Chicago. Featuring Geoff Packard, Monica West, Jonathan Butler-Duplessis, Ron E. Rains and Kelly Felthous. Music, Lyrics and Book (with Franklin Lacey) by Meredith Willson. Directed by Mary Zimmerman. For more information about the Goodman Theatre of Chicago, [click here](#). [20]



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