

Theater Review: Kokandy Productions ‘Head Over Heels’ Sparkles with Joy, Passion and Life

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 16, 2019 - 1:45pm

- [Belmont Theater District](#) [2]
- [Head Over Heels](#) [3]
- [Heaven in a Place on Earth](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Kokandy Productions](#) [6]
- [LBGTQ+](#) [7]
- [Mad About You](#) [8]
- [Our Lips Are Sealed](#) [9]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [10]
- [The Arcadia](#) [11]
- [The Go-Gos](#) [12]
- [Theater Review](#) [13]
- [Theater Wit](#) [14]
- [Vacation](#) [15]
- [We Got the Beat](#) [16]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [17]

CHICAGO – Kokandy Productions is one of the best in Chicago doing musicals, and scores again with “Head Over Heels,” through August 25th, 2019, at Theater Wit. For more details and tickets, [click here](#). [18]



Play Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Not knowing what “Head Over Heels” was about is part of the sheer pleasure of experiencing it. I knew it had the music of The Go-Go’s – that exquisite all-female pop/rock band that exploded in the 1980s – but would it be a jukebox musical, a 1980s nostalgia or something equally unimaginative? The answer, gratefully, was no. “Head Over Heels” is adapted from a pastoral romance written in the 16th Century, modernized with sparkling hilarity, and features the best songs of The Go-Go’s in perfect context, premiering in Chicago only six months after it ended its Broadway run.



The Oracle Pythio (center) Leads Us All in ‘Head Over Heels’
Photo credit: Michael Brosilow for Kokandy Productions

When Sir Philips Sidney wrote “The Arcadia” back in the late 16th Century, I hope the gods of theater gave him a vision that someday it would be adapted for a pop music stage play. It wasn’t until the 20th Century that Sidney’s work was rediscovered, and it was Jeff Whitty who

conceived of The Go-Go's/Arcadia marriage and the original book (and was further adapted by James Magruder). The story is of a kingdom who relies on "the beat" (as in "We Got the Beat"), and is bedeviled by an oracle who predicts the kingdom's collapse if his predictions come true. One by one, the visions are actualized, threatening the way of life that the king and his subjects had always known.

Kokandy Productions has a knack for bringing large scale musicals to smaller spaces and making them as big as a Broadway stage. The sheer exuberance of "Head Over Heels" makes it immediately pleasurable, beginning with the opening rendition of "We Got the Beat." It kicks off the life of the play, which uses its faux Shakespearian language to great comic effect. There is something to be said for combining 1980s pop/rock – especially the great songs of The Go-Go's – with the intrigue of a kingdom in the time of princes and princesses.

And speaking of identifiers like prince and princess, "Head Over Heels" skewers those gender designations with true respect, love and sly comedy. One of my newest heroes is the Oracle Pythio (Parker Guidry) who just loves life and causing their style of chaos. They are delicious. The way the rest of the couples hook up is part of the lesson of the show, especially with the misunderstanding of a new man-to-woman cross dresser who comes into their midst. This is beyond a sense of pride for orientation, towards an understanding of this is reality.



The Cross Dresser Appears in 'Head Over Heels'

Photo credit: Michael Brosilow for Kokandy Productions

The main cast and ensemble includes Bridget Adams-King, Jeremiah Alsop, Emily Barnash, Frankie Leo Bennett, Caitlyn Cerza, Caitlin Dobbins, Britain Gebhardt, Connor Giles, Kaimana Neil, Liz Norton, Deanalís Reston, Shane Roberie and Roy Samba. I name them because their energy brings a perfect theater experience for the audience. In the day-to-day challenges of life, it is performance that takes us out of our heads ... our head over heels.

Kokandy Productions presents "Head Over Heels" through August 25th, 2019, at Theater Wit, 1229 West Belmont Avenue, Chicago. Conceived and original book by Jeff Whitty. Adapted by James Magruder. Music by The Go-Go's. Co-directed by Derek Van Barham and Elizabeth Swanson. For details on the cast and Kokandy Productions, [click here](#). [19]



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[3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/head-over-heels>

[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/heaven-in-a-place-on-earth>

[5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>

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