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# Flambe Dreams

by Montserrat Mendez

A so-sweet-you might-get-diabetes musical about pursuing your life's purpose, Matthew Hardy and Randy Klein's *Flambe Dreams* (at NYMF) is a gloriously innocent show that has potential but might need to have a dessert knife gently cut it. I didn't realize until the beginning of the second act that I was familiar with *Flambe Dreams*, because I had seen the second act before in workshop a few years ago. It was great to see the entire thing this time around. It allowed me to appreciate an artful, lovely piece of theatre in its entirety.

The story is familiar: a damaged young man takes a big leap of faith to pursue his lifelong dream to make it big in the glamorous world of food and beverage service in the big city. Upon arriving he is overwhelmed, finds girl, loses girl, meets another girl on the Internet and lucks into the job of his dreams. There are some details peppered through that flavor the familiarity: the young man Joe is dependent on Prozac; his mother's sole ambition is to see him succeed and wants it so much that she's actually the one keeping him from it; his muse is a Duane Reade pharmacist whose best friend is the prostitute who works right outside of her street corner in midtown. The completely expected is mixed with the unexpected. It's like eating a soufflé and taking a shot of whiskey.

What Hardy and Klein have managed to do however is take formula and mix in a ton of humor and heart. Helping him out is astute direction by West Hyler, who moves the piece at a pace that must be brisk for the actors, but allows for the humor to shine and the book's simplicity to keep a sense of surprise. Hardy's lyrics work best when he explores love through wit as in the song "Lesions of the Heart."

And then there's that cast. It is a pretty spectacular cast. Jarrod Spector has the difficult role of Joe who is both the romantic lead but handicapped by his mental instability. It's hard to make a role like that seductive, but he hits just the right note of seductive innocence. Catharine Cox as Joe's psychiatrist mother is a woman who focuses her anxiety on her son to avoid dealing with her own insecurities as a mother. Jillian Louis as Gloria is a star in the making; she has charisma and talent to spare, and while some of her musical moments tended to be repetitive she sold them with her acting choices (and if anyone ever does a musical about the life of Julie Andrews I'd nominate her to star in it). She is terrific. J. Elaine Marcus as Desiree and D.D. is a comedic find; her prostitute is hilarious, as if a Disney princess had moved to the ghetto and learned to survive without losing her hopeful spunk. However, I will give my gold star to Kevin B. McGlynn and the multitude of roles he played. This is an actor with range, not only range, but also a true joy for performance, that joy is infectious and also kind of inspirational.

The songs are clever even when Hardy and Klein verge into the cliché, with "Helping Children," "Some Girls," "Perfection," and the aforementioned "Lesions of the Heart" being particularly fantastic. My personal belief is that this show has potential to spare, but like the desserts at its heart, it may work best in the 100-minute range and go without an intermission. This type of musical, like *The Drowsy Chaperone*, needs to pick up momentum and the intermission broke the spell. Because the story is so sweet and fairy tale-like, I found that once the lights came up for intermission and I did my first Facebook check, I allowed cynicism to creep in. We live at an age where our attention and therefore imaginations are quickly pulled away and once this deserving musical has its hooks into us it should not let us go. There may be some interior cuts throughout that could help it achieve this, like the overlong "Crazy" which overstayed is welcome once the point was made. However, kudos to everyone involved. I think there's something really special here and that it's just about ready to come out of the oven.