

Musical made for musical lovers

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Broadway-based spectacle classy, comical, moving



Karen Myatt and Stuart Hiseler are the stars of *Broadway Without Borders*, onstage at Chester Playhouse until Aug. 4. Myatt and Hiseler also conceived and wrote the two-hour show.

I'm a huge Broadway fan.

I love musicals.

I also love the offstage drama — backstage rivalries, love affairs, stars being plucked from the chorus for leading roles.

So it's no surprise that I was enchanted and thoroughly entertained by *Broadway Without Borders* onstage at Chester Playhouse until Aug. 4.

The fast-paced, finely crafted, funny cabaret, conceived and written by its stars Stuart Hiseler and Karen Myatt, also earned an enthusiastic standing ovation from its audience on Wednesday night.

In the two-hour production, Hiseler and Myatt run through songs from nearly 40 Broadway shows, from classics like *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *West Side Story* and *South Pacific*, to modern hits like *Chicago*, *The Producers* and *Avenue Q*.

They intersperse the tunes with tales of studying, looking for love and trying to work in New York City as Canadians. Border guards are on the lookout for "immigrant intent," they explain, people looking to make a living without having a visa.

Hiseler and Myatt, through their production company Wild Abandon, staged a sold-out cabaret titled *Immigrant Intent* at the Company House in Halifax last summer. They took it to Montreal and New York in February. In December, they produced the hit holiday show, *A Wild Abandon Christmas!* and in March staged *More Amore — A Cabaret*.

Broadway Without Borders, a co-production by Wild Abandon and Chester Playhouse, returns to their New York adventures.

The show is irreverent and, at times, hilariously off-colour. It brims with good humour and hope.

Myatt and Hiseler both grew up in the Halifax area and both studied with Halifax voice teacher Janice Jackson. They met doing a production of *Red, Hot and Cole* at Theatre Arts Guild in Halifax.

Both have excellent voices, spanning a large range and capable of conveying naughtiness, happiness, despair and dreams. And they dance up a storm and create believable characters while charming the audience.

Myatt, making her Playhouse debut, tells the audience she grew up in Herring Cove and attended the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City.

Hiseler, who starred in Chester in *The Musical of Musicals — the Musical!* and *Once Upon a Mattress*, counters that he grew up in Armdale and also attended the American Musical and Dramatic Academy, graduating in 1986.

“I was born in 1986,” replies Myatt with a gleeful laugh.

Among the highlights: a Canadianized version of America (there’s no HST in America just don’t get sick in America) from *West Side Story*, a soaring *Circle of Life* from the *Lion King*, a fanciful look at finding love in the New York clubs in *Moving Right Along* by Jeff Blumenkrantz and a sassy version of *Springtime for Hitler* from *The Producers*.

The duo are both great comics.

Hiseler is hilarious as a very gay, dancing cleaner in *The Naked Maid* from *Naked Boys Singing* and as a timid, athletically challenged teen in *Last One Picked* from Howard Crabtree’s *Whoop Dee Doo!*

Myatt nails the perils of oversharing in the priceless TMI by Derek Gregor and Sam Carner and is utterly relateable in *I’m Not Pregnant* from *R.R.R.E.D.*

And *Everyone’s A Little Bit Racist* from *Avenue Q*, which follows Myatt’s self-deprecating rant about being cast as everything from a Puerto Rican to an African-Canadian-American but not a white woman, is insightful as well as funny. Hiseler proves a great foil.

Directed by Playhouse artistic director Mary Lou Martin, the show also features smoothly professional live accompaniment by Scott Taylor on keyboards, Fayette Taylor on bass and Stephanie McKeown on percussion.

The set is simple — a white curtain as a backdrop that takes on various hues from the lights designed by Bob Elliott — and two sets of cafe tables and chairs. It complements but doesn’t distract from the performers’ outfits, a mix of casual daywear and performance class, designed by Janet MacLellan.

Broadway Without Borders runs today at 2 and 8 p.m., Tuesday to Aug. 4 at 8 p.m., and Aug. 4 at 2 p.m. Wednesday is pay-what-you-can night.

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