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'The Legend of Georgia McBride' - fun and acceptance at Town Hall Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

Opening its 75th anniversary season, Town Hall Theatre offers its audience a show that's part cabaret, part play: "The Legend of Georgia McBride." The story of Casey, a young father-to-be pushed by circumstance to become a drag queen at night and the difficulty he has to accept and share with his wife the real pleasure he derives from it, carries an optimistic message of acceptance and freedom. While the show is easy to love, it is not for younger audiences due to sexually-charged (and mostly funny) language.

In the Bay Area where LGBTQ has become a part of everyday language (although this reporter had to look up what QIAA+ meant: questioning, intersex, asexual, and ally), and fluid sexual orientation is now replacing nonbinary, it would seem that transvestite should not be a topic that would raise any eyebrows. But as the show director Cindy

Goldfield noted, in 2018 alone there were some 1,000 hate crimes perpetrated against non-traditional individuals in California. The play offers a message of tolerance toward differences and explores how a straight guy, Elvis impersonator and soon to be father, can easily become a woman and find a freeing pleasure in it. For that matter, the first transformation of Casey into Georgia on stage, and within less than a minute, is both striking and fascinating.

The general feeling of the play is that of a giant party where the audience is encouraged to participate, clap to the beat, cheer and have fun. At times one no longer knows if this is indeed a cabaret show or a theater performance.

The play is light, even if two or three times Matthew Lopez, the playwright, adds some dialogue alluding to the difficulty of being different, to the importance of looking past appearances and prejudices, and to being true to oneself and one's choices.

Extra kudos goes to the cast: Greg Lynch as Miss Tracy is such a drag empress, with a big heart, a total talent for extravaganza and a monumental presence. Andrew Mondello portrays a very believable Casey, slowly transforming from Elvis to drag queen and escalating his game to the totally fun and crazy finale. Héctor Ramón Zavala as Remy delivers a performance that has depth and poignancy at times - more than one spectator may be astonished to realize after the show that he also plays Jason the landlord, as he is unrecognizable in that other role. Aficionados to THT will recognize Tom Relly as Eddie and April Deitschle as Jo, Casey's young wife, a woman with common sense and a big heart.

The costumes by Shelby Pujol and all the scenic design contribute to make this show a successful visual, auditory and sensory moment of fun.

"The Legend of Georgia McBride" plays at Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette through Oct. 19. For more information, visit townhalltheatre.com

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[back](#)

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