

## Theatre by the Numbers: Not-So-Random Moments from 2007

Written by Mike Schulz

Wednesday, 19 December 2007 02:56

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I love making lists. Love it. And I get an annual charge out of composing "10 best"s for the *Reader* based on my movie-going experiences: 10 Best Films, 10 Best Guilty Pleasures, 10 Best Action Blockbusters Based on a Pre-Existing Toy ... .

So when I started thinking about my forthcoming Year in Theatre recap a few weeks ago, I thought it might make for a fun change of pace to compose "best" lists for area stage productions.

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Of course, with 64 theatrical works to cull from as opposed to the 164 (and counting) movies I've seen in 2007, a slew of top 10s seemed a bit much. But certainly I could come up with top fives: best comedies, best musicals, best actors and actresses ... . *What a great idea*, I thought.

That great idea lasted all of five minutes.

Comparing the stage presentations at local venues - and the individual achievements therein - isn't so much comparing apples to oranges as it is comparing apples to oranges to grapefruits to pomegranates to watermelons. How, for instance, can you fairly compare a hugely scaled musical at Rock Island's Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse to a small-scale one performed a few blocks away at The Green Room? How do you compare community-theatre productions at the Quad City Music Guild, Genesius Guild, Countryside Community Theatre, and Playcrafters and Richmond Hill Barn Theatres - where most participants *volunteer* their time and energy - with the professional (i.e., *paid*) offerings at the Clinton Area Showboat Theatre and the Timber Lake Playhouse?

And how do you compare performances? Are the portrayals at Augustana College, St. Ambrose University, and Black Hawk College somehow less worthy of "best" consideration because they don't yet have the experience of actors working for New Ground Theatre, My Verona Productions, or the Prenzie Players? Isn't Miranda Lipes' work in Black Hawk's *Going Underground*, for example, beautiful partly because she's still so new to the theatrical process, whereas Diane Greenwood in Richmond Hill's *California Suite* is marvelous precisely because of her extensive stage experience?

Instead of compiling "bests," then, I've taken a more (almost) random approach: lists of 12, 10, five, and three that, I hope, give a fair indication of the extraordinary wealth of talent and variety found in 2007's area stage productions. As usual, and to my continual shame, I've given short shrift to directors and technical artists in the area - and I hope they recognize acknowledgment of their shows here as acknowledgment of their work, too - and the lists are hardly exhaustive.

But the following are people and moments that have stuck with me throughout another remarkable journey through the year's theatre scene, even though I certainly have more fond memories than the ones you'll find here.

## 10 Great Performances



**Lora Adams, *Bad Dates*.** In New Ground's solo comedy, Adams - who rattled off her dialogue and changed clothes with spectacular quickness and offhanded wit - wasn't just an effortlessly likable and charming monologist; she was a dynamic, one-woman bedroom farce. Never has the act of watching someone try on shoes - for 90 minutes! - been so bewitching.

**Melissa Anderson Clark, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.** Music Guild's production was a pretty enormous show; how exactly did Clark fit the whole thing into her pocket and stroll off with it? Exuding ceaseless joy and demonstrating powerful vocal chops, the actress even pulled off the pratfall of the year, when Millie's misguided attempt at seducing her boss found her landing smack on her ass. I was practically on my ass from *laughing* so hard.

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**Adam Clough, *Oklahoma!*** Oh, what a beautiful baritone! From the opening seconds of Circa '21's Rodgers & Hammerstein classic, Clough entranced the audience with his supremely rich, commanding vocals, and he proved to be as marvelous an actor as he is a singer; you've rarely, if ever, seen the egotistical Curly played with such disarming depth.

**Heather Herkelman, *Anything Goes*.** It would be hard to imagine a more intimidating group of local talents than the ones who populated Music Guild's musical comedy, and this supremely inventive, radiant, and hysterical young actress swiped the production away from all of them. The show's best comedic bit? Herkelman's Erma frantically searching for a note stashed in her toilet-paper-stuffed brassiere. Its *second-best?*

Herkelman's expression while searching, which implied, "Not *again*

... ."



**Mandy Landreth, *Sylvia*.** For her first major role on the Playcrafters stage, Landreth was given a literal bitch of a part as A.R. Gurney's humanized puppy, and was so ferociously funny that her comic candor shocked as often as it amused - making her even *f* *unnier*

. (I can still hear her vociferous shriek at a passing feline: "I hate your

*guts*

, kitty! And don't! You!

*Ever*

forget it!")

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**Kent M. Lewis, *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*.** There are plenty of reasons to catch Circa '21's current musical, but try finding a better one than the confident, thrillingly versatile Lewis, who erases all memories of Bing Crosby in about 30 seconds. And delivering a smoky rendition of "Blue Skies," stunningly well-choreographed by Ann Nieman, the actor leads something too rarely seen on area stages: a truly sexy musical number.

**Jeremy Mahr, *King Henry the Fourth*.** In a recent comment posted on the *Reader Web* site, an anonymous writer stated

'  
"I'd see Jeremy Mahr in 52 productions a year." Ah, if wishing made it so. Always excellent, Mahr was positively hypnotic in the second part of the Prenzie Players'

*Henriad*

trilogy; unlike his dying ruler, the audience didn't

*dare*

cough for fear of ruining a perfectly realized moment.

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~~Not-So-Random Moments from 2007: A collection of memorable moments from the year 2007, including a man in a brown and gold costume holding a woman in a pink and purple costume.~~



~~Not-So-Random Moments from 2007: A collection of memorable moments from the year 2007, including a man in a black and gold costume playing a white guitar for a woman in a red and gold costume.~~



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Jeff Gribble's "Butter" with Mike Schulz in "Chickens" performed at the Los Angeles Music Center



Wilson Oatis' "Wants" performed at the Los Angeles Music Center  
"Maybe you just had to be there. I certainly hope so. No, you're perfect, now change."