Written by Mike Schulz
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In the second act of the magnificent musical parody *Urinetown*, the character of Bobby Strong - a novice revolutionary, and the show's ostensible leading man - sings "Run, Freedom, Run," a rousing call-to-arms to his fellow oppressed. The number, a sort of "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat" from *Guys & Dolls* as seen through a *Les Miserables* filter, is one of those guaranteed show-stoppers designed to leave audiences cheering. At the Timber Lake Playhouse's Saturday-night performance of the show, however, this production number led to something even more thrilling.

After the song ended, there were indeed cheers from the Timber Lake audience. Yet then something rare happened. After about 10 seconds of hearty applause - which is pretty standard for post-song clapping - the ovation didn't wane. It remained constant for at least five more seconds, and then the fervor of the applause actually *increased*; you could feel the audience collectively wanting to applaud as loudly, and for as long, as we could. In the end, I'd say the ovation lasted between 30 and 40 seconds. (That may not sound like a long time spent clapping, but just *try* it some time.) For a few moments in the middle of Act II, this *Urinetown* show-stopper actually *did* stop the show.

Every once in a while - if you're lucky - you'll enjoy an experience of this sort in the theatre, one where, as an audience member, you feel you can't fully express your happiness and gratitude to those on-stage. But in this regard, I'm luckier than the rest of Saturday's crowd, as I actually get to write - and have published - the following: Timber Lake's *Urinetown* is a *spectacularly* fine production, so clever and confident and joyously performed that I'd have been happy for it to go on all night. Screw 40 seconds; at the curtain call, I would have applauded for 40 *minutes*.

Director Brad Lyons - who recently helmed the theatre's terrific *Thoroughly Modern Millie* - appears to be almost absurdly talented.
Urinetown
has been designed as a musical-theatre lover's dream, and aided by James Beaudry's excellent choreography, the musical numbers here mange to simultaneously spoof and pay homage to nearly a dozen Broadway shows, generally with laugh-out-loud-funny results. ("Tell Her I Love Her," which viciously pokes fun at Eponine's demise in
Les Miz
, is particularly brilliant.) Yet the show isn't any kind of prolonged in-joke; you don't need to be a theatre major to roar at the
West Side Story
and
Fiddler on the Roof
references. Lyons obviously knows his musical clichés and conventions and has exquisite fun with them here, and his spiritedness certainly seems to have rubbed off on his extraordinary cast.

Tops among equals are Courtney Crouse, whose hilarious and vocally passionate Bobby reveals a fearsome amount of talent - where has Timber Lake been *hiding* this guy? - and the radiant Abby Haug, achingly hysterical as
Urinetown
's comedic conscience, Little Sally. A batch of other performers are nearly as fine: the dryly funny, ever-marvelous Ella Mouria Seet; Robert Maher (deliciously malevolent); the pricelessly prissy Ben Mason; Meredith Gifford and Sean Riley - both of whom perform wonders with minor roles - and Justin Sample, who pulls off incredible walking-stick shtick.

Hannah Jacobs and Kyle Sandall provide the sort of powerhouse vocals that can knock you sideways, and Seth Lieber does loose-limbed physical comedy with aplomb. And mention must also be made of the infectious delight of performers Sarah Dothage, Christopher Russell, Erin Childs, Amee Binder, Eli Pauley, and choreographer Beaudry, whose on-stage accomplishments match his off-stage ones.

Well, look at that. That's the entire cast.

Marvelously designed and costumed, with a five-person band playing exceedingly well, *Urinetown* is
the finest stage entertainment I've been to in many, many months, and the best time I've had at Timber Lake since last summer's production of

The Full Monty
. Coincidentally, I saw
that
show - the first one I'd ever attended at the Mt. Carroll venue - on July 1, one year to the day from when I saw
Urinetown
. Talk about a happy anniversary.

For tickets, call (815) 244-2035.