

Written by Mike Schulz
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As the title character in the Quad City Music Guild's presentation of *George M!*, Kevin Pieper works his tail off. His Broadway impresario George Cohan belts out number after number, he tap dances, he storms through scenes with natural authority; in this musical-comedy biography, the role of Cohan is practically a show unto himself, and the energy that Pieper gives the part is admirable.

More often than not, though, it's energy in a void, because with precious few exceptions, the *George M!* ensemble isn't giving anything back

. At any given time, there are up to 44 performers sharing the stage with Pieper, yet it takes little more than one hand to count the number of them who look pleased to be there. Thursday's preview performance, at least, showed Pieper having to work both the audience and the cast, and that's more responsibility than any single performer should be burdened with.

Yankee Doodle Not-So-Dandy: "George M!," at the Prospect Park Auditorium through July 16

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credit, the
George M!
cast taps quite well. They should follow Truitt's and Triebel's leads and look like they're
enjoying
it more.)

Yet Swegle, who continually places his actors in flat, chorus-line configurations, doesn't do much to enliven the book scenes - oftentimes, he splits the focus between two (or even three) points of focus so we don't know *what* we're supposed to be looking at - and he can't disguise the overriding sense of fear on stage; sadly, he hasn't given the actors much reason to
not
look fearful.

To be fair, much of the disappointment of *George M!* lies beyond Music Guild's production of it. We're given no insight into how the central character became "the man who owned Broadway" - surely it took more than sheer gumption? - and the libretto feels strangely incomplete; audiences have to take Cohan's legendary patriotism on faith, as
George M!
barely acknowledges it. Despite the tuneful score,
George M!
, in itself, doesn't seem a very strong show. But given Music Guild's earnest but underwhelming efforts, I wasn't fooled - as I
should
have been - into thinking otherwise.

For tickets, call (309)762-6610.