

An excellent ‘The Behavior of Broadus’ at Capital Stage

HIGHLIGHTS

Musical explores work of John Broadus Watson, father of behaviorism

Bravura performances pair with award-winning music

New play comes from LA-based Burglars of Hamm





BY MARCUS CROWDER
mcrowder@sacbee.com

“Just because we can do it, does that mean we should we do it?” That long has been one of the great questions of modern science. In experiments large and small, ethical questions concerning the research often have overshadowed what the work aims to accomplish.

Luckily for the rollicking, creative roller coaster musical “The Behavior of Broadus” now at Capital Stage, the thoughtful lab rat Phil has a conscience that keeps every one honest. Well maybe not everyone and maybe not entirely honest, but Phil does have a conscience, and his sense of right and wrong gives the often riotous play a bit of needed sobriety.

Written by Burglars of Hamm and directed by their Albert Dayan, “The Behavior of Broadus” tells the mostly true story of John Broadus Watson (1878-1958), the American psychologist who established the concept of behaviorism and who also had controversial theories on advertising and child rearing.

Superficially Watson’s behaviorist theories put the emphasis on external behavior of people and their reactions to given situations, rather than the internal, mental state of those people.

The Los Angeles-based writing and performing quartet comprising Matt Almos, Carolyn Almos, Jon Beauregard and Dayan wrote the book of the musical, and the songs are credited to Matt Almos, composer Brendan Milburn, and Burglars of Hamm. The 2014 Los Angeles production of the play recently won Ovation Awards for Best Book of an Original Musical, and Best Lyrics/Composition of an Original Musical.

The moving portrayal of Phil the Rat by Andrew Perez supports a bravura performance by Francis Gercke as self-centered, self-contained Watson. Gercke infuses a dynamic intensity and eventually moodier sadness into the cleverly conceived satire.

Plenty of laughs come from a variety of sources throughout the production, particularly the witty, inventive songs and Ken Roht’s droll comic choreography.

Nanci Zoppi contributes several beautiful vocal solos and a hilariously clinical turn as lab assistant Rosalie Raymer who becomes Broadus' second wife. One of Watson's most infamous episodes has been called "the Little Albert experiment," and Connor Mickiewicz takes Albert through an impressive range of emotional changes as central figure in the play. The ensemble also includes fine performances from Sean Patrick Nill, Tara Henry, Don Hayden, and Alissa Doyle who all play several roles.

The production's excellence is enhanced by Jason Thompson's projection images and Ann Closs-Farley's animal masks. Pianist Graham Sobleman leads a sprightly quartet of multi-instrumentalists through the lively, varied music.

The play's last third turns downright somber as cleverness takes a back seat to melancholy. Director Dayan skillfully balances the dazzling energy of the production's manic spectacle with the decided darkness of Watson's personal life and the real-world ramifications of his experiments.

"Broadus" could have been simply a biographical time line set to smart funny songs, but Broadus doesn't get off the hook quite that easily.

Marcus Crowder: 916-321-1120, @marcuscrowder

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THE BEHAVIOR OF BROADUS

What: Capital Stage presents the Sacramento premiere of a new musical, more or less about John Broadus Watson, father of behaviorism and modern advertising. Written by Burglars of Hamm and directed by Albert Dayan.

Where: Capital Stage, 2215 J St., Sacramento

When: 7 p.m. Tuesdays-Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays-Fridays; 2 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays through Sunday, Jan. 3. No performances Christmas Day or New Year's Day.

Cost: \$30-\$50

Information: 916-995-5464; capstage.org

Two hours and 15 minutes including intermission