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Review: THE KID FROM BROOKLYN: THE DANNY KAYE STORY

The ONLY way to see Danny Kaye on stage in the modern era

Grade: A

Stars: Brian Childers, Karin Leone, Joshua Finkel, Christina Purcell

Writer(s): Mark Childres & Peter J. Loewy

Director: Peter J. Loewy, SSDC

By SEAN ELLIOTT, Senior Editor

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Anyone who ever watched Danny Kaye either in movies, or on his own TV show, or even if you were lucky enough to catch the comic genius live on stage; you have GOT to see this show playing through January 27th at the El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood, CA.

THE KID FROM BROOKLYN: THE DANNY KAYE STORY tells the story of the legendary funnyman Danny Kaye from his humble beginnings on the vaudeville circuit to his work with UNICEF and his years in films, TV, and on Broadway. The show is of course musical and uses minimalist sets to enable the cast to quickly transition from location to location and quickly switch between different eras in Kaye's career and personal life with cleverly designed costumes, wigs and accessories from various time periods. The play is one part upbeat comedy, one part drama, and one big part walk down memory lane.

The show manages to convey quickly to an audience the highs and lows in Kaye's career and personal life. A vast body of comedic routines and songs are featured in the show even if they are only able to show just a snippet of it to keep the story moving. The show finds an interesting balance between the funnyman face that Kaye showed everyone and the actual drama that was going on behind the scenes including his affair with Eve Arden and his somewhat dysfunctional family life. Interestingly enough, all of the touchier material is handled with tact and grace and the production never slides into the gutter to tell its story as is so often the case when true Hollywood stories are adapted for the stage or screen. This play is more of an honoring of Kaye and the smiles that he brought to the world.

Brian Childers as Danny Kaye is absolutely uncanny in his portrayal; in fact one could even go so far as to say that while watching the performance it's extremely easy to forget that you aren't watching the real Danny Kaye on the stage before you. When Childers is in the middle of a comedic or musical routine that is well known to Kaye fans, I would defy them to even argue with facial movement that the actor uses, his performance is that bang on.

Karin Leone as Sylvia Fine, Kaye's wife has one of the most emotional and difficult roles in the show. Very rarely does she get the laugh lines, and she is the primary adult behind the childlike glamour that Kaye brought to the world. Leone not only makes you feel the anguish over running Kaye's life while he was having affairs, but manages to make you actually take her side in many of the arguments (which is no easy feat considering that the play is mainly about Kaye).

The other two actors in the cast (yes only four people in this cast) Joshua Finkel and Christina Purcell are absolutely amazing. The two of them have to rapidly rotate from character to character with quick costume changes and wig or hat changes with often only a few minutes between each character. The actors handle this exceptionally well, and even though you know they are the same people in reality, it is easy to forget that all of those roles that you have been watching aren't different people. In terms of actors that can play multiple roles in one show, these two do one of the best jobs in terms of creating physicality and vocal designs for each person they play.

Despite all of the drama shown in Kaye's personal life, this play is a love letter to one of the most classic comedian, song and dance men of our time. It's a couple hours well spent and you leave with warmth that is a unique feeling you only really get from performers from that golden age in entertainment's history. All of it brought to you by a well directed modern cast that has a chameleon-like ability to become people from another era and to make you forget you aren't living in the past while sitting in your theatre seat.

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