

LA WEEKLY

By L.A. Weekly Theater Critics

Monday, December 24, 2007 - 4:41 pm



Brian Childers & Christina Purcell
The Kid From Brooklyn
(Photo by Ed Krieger)

The Kid From Brooklyn (Photo by Ed Krieger) THE KID FROM BROOKLYN: The Danny Kaye Story Sometimes the old showbiz stories are the best, and in Mark Childers and Peter J. Loewy's peppy and assured musical biography of entertainer Danny Kaye, we find crackling showmanship interlaced with just a hint of irony. Performer Brian Childers offers a dazzling turn as the legendary Broadway star which is eerily convincing, even to the slight smirk. Childers channels a perfect mix of the sentimental, feel-good charisma that enchanted his audiences, and the inner emotional vacancy that led to a troubled and sometimes self-destructive personal life. Act 1 charts Kaye's early rise to fame in a straightforward way, including his marriage to his bossy but increasingly scorned business partner, Sylvia Fine (Karin Leone, in a wonderfully brassy performance). In Act 2, as Kaye's marriage frays, and as he gives in to the sultry advances of his Jezebel leading lady, Eve Arden (Christina Purcell), we see the layers of darkness behind Kaye's pastel exterior. Although the play's daunting two-and-a-half-hour length is a little top-heavy for material that is ultimately slight, director Loewy's crisp staging is nicely complemented by Charlie Harrison and David Cohen's tight musical direction. Childers' beautiful tenor dazzles with spot-on renditions of such Kaye favorites as "Mad Dogs and Englishmen," and his famous gibberish patter-song, "Melody in 4F." EL PORTAL THEATRE, 5269 Lankershim Blvd., N. Hollywood; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m.; thru Jan. 20. (818) 508-0281. (Paul Birchall)