



Review: *It Shoulda Been You*

at the George Street Playhouse

Rick Busciglio, Northern New Jersey Theater Examiner

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Take one part Abie's Irish Rose, add one part TV's Brigit Loves Bernie and take one part the early stand-up routines of Anne Meara (Irish Catholic) and husband Jerry Stiller (Jewish), mix gently and you have a hint of the hilarity happening at the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick. Saturday night was the world premiere of a bright, fun-filled musical with an all-star cast *It Shoulda Been You*.

As with the plays and performers just mentioned...*It Shoulda Been You* is the story of the marriage of a Jew and a Catholic. In this case the marriage day has all the action taking place in a hotel. First modest twist, unlike the others, the bride Rebecca Steinberg (played by Jessica Hershberg) is Jewish and the groom Brian Howard (played by Matthew Hydzik) is Catholic.

The brides parents, played to comic perfection, are Tony winner Tyne Daly (fresh from rave reviews in *The Master Class* on Broadway) as Judy Steinberg, a Jewish mother to end all mothers who considers her all powerful control of her husband and two daughters to be her divine right; and the husband, Murray Steinberg, who knows his place and keeps there out of harms way, is played by the marvelous character actor, Richard Kline. At one point in a conversation with his daughters he confesses that "Your Mother and I had words....I just didn't get to use any of mine."

The groom's parents are played by Tony-winner, and outstanding comic actress Harriet Harris as Georgette Howard, and as the obligatory, stuffed-shirt WASPish absentee father George Howard is Broadway veteran with a handful of well deserved Tony nominations, Howard McGillin. Howard must be happy to have his handsome face on view after his record-setting performances behind a mask in the title role of the most successful entertainment property in history, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*.

The Steinberg's have two daughters, Rebecca (Jessica Hershberg) the attractive petite bride, and Jenny, the attractive older sister who is a bit more than petite. Mother Judy holds out little or no hope for Jenny to find a man unless she loses substantial poundage. The part of Jenny is played by a showstopper of a performer, Lisa Howard. She brought many members of the audience, albeit a friendly first night audience, to their feet with her knock-out number Jenny's Blues. Lisa, Tyne and Harriet are the stars of the production, but, the supporting cast is terrific.

As with any lavish wedding there is a Wedding Planner. In *It Shoulda Been You* it is Albert played with great style by Broadway and television (*Frasier*) veteran Edward Hibbert. Albert is not only sly, but super efficient. He appears to be endowed with ESP appearing out of nowhere at exactly the right moment with exactly the right solution to the problem at hand. He garners more laughs than most, except for Tyne and Harriet.

One of the many musical high points, we should note that all the songs are nicely integrated into the plot, comes early in the first act when the brides' former boyfriend, Marty Kaufman (nicely played by David Josefsberg) arrives uninvited for the sole purpose of stopping the wedding. Murray and Judy Steinberg and other family members, ancient Uncle Morty (Tom Deckman) and over-sexed Aunt Sheila (Mylinda Hull) all turn to Marty, their great Jewish hope for Rebecca, and sing with passion the title song....*It Shoulda Been You!*

Rounding out the wedding party is a fine actress and singer Carla Duren as the close friend and bridesmaid, Annie Sheps. The best man and the groom's close friend, Greg Madison is played by Curtis Holbrook. Curtis and Carla have a fun time with a second act duet *Love You Till The Day*.

Back to young Tom Deckman who plays dual roles, Uncle Morty, and the waiter/general wedding assistant Walt, the nephew of Albert. He is delightful, an excellent comedian who appears more than ready for bigger things.

The play is directed by the noted actor (Tony and Emmy winner), and now an impressive first-time director, David Hyde Pierce. The creators of *It Shoulda Been You* are Brian Hargrove, book and lyrics, and music by Barbara Anselmi.

Is there life for the musical after the George Street Playhouse run? Broadway? It's a fun piece, with several plot twists that we won't reveal. It is far from dated material, such as *Abie's Irish Rose*, with its contemporary theme of love and marriage, and is blessed with good music. Happily, we note that it is scheduled to run in Washington State from mid-March to mid-May at the Village Theatre.

Production comments are very much in order. The one set is terrific. It is used in the classic style of the Marx Brothers with amusing exits and entrances. It is the work of scenic designer Anna Louizos, the excellent costumes are by five-time Tony Award-winning costume designer William Ivey Long. The lighting designer is Ken Billington, choreographer Noah Racey, wig and hair Paul Huntley, music director Greg Anthony and three-time Tony Award-winning orchestrator Douglas Besterman. They all have Broadway credits. The sound design is by Acme Sound Partners. The production stage manager is Thomas Clewell.

You have until November 4, 2011 to see this remarkable production.