

CABARETSCENES

The Greenwich Village Follies

Manhattan Theatre Source
New York, NJ



In 1919, writer/director John Murray Anderson launched the first edition of The Greenwich Village Follies, which was such a hit that it soon transferred from a theater in the Village to Broadway. The 1920 edition repeated that pattern, opening in the Village and then transferring to Broadway. Subsequent editions—in 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925, and 1928—never played in Greenwich Village at all; by then, The Greenwich Village Follies was such an established success that each new edition opened in a top Broadway musical house, such as the Shubert Theater and the Winter Garden. These were lavish, opulent, carefully crafted revues, designed to give The Ziegfeld Follies and George White's Scandals a run for their money. They featured major stars of the era, including Ted Lewis, Joe E. Brown, Martha Graham, Irene Franklin, Benny Field and Blossom Seeley, and introduced such enduringly popular hit songs as "When My Baby Smiles at Me" and "Three O'Clock in the Morning." Anderson proved such a master of the revue form he was called upon to direct revues for others—including the well-received Ziegfeld Follies of 1934, 1936, and 1943.

Currently, there is a woefully uneven, self-indulgent musical revue playing in a teeny theatre on MacDougal Street, calling itself The Greenwich Village Follies. It hardly seems fit to bear that illustrious name. And when, at one point in the show, they make reference to the original Greenwich Village Follies, whose name they have borrowed, they manage to get the facts wrong, making it sound like the original was some casual showcase for local talent. It's not a good sign that they can't even get the facts right when they mention the show that presumably helped inspire their own.

The creative team for this oddly disjointed concoction includes Andrew Frank (book, lyrics, direction), Doug Silver (music, lyrics), and Fran Kirmser (original concept). The show alternates between scenes that are plodding and pedantic, and others that are bright and clever. The concept of the show is a good one—trying to give an overview of the Village in eighty minutes. And I love the energy of the four-person cast (which is joined by a different guest star each week). But it is awkward watching scenes that just don't work, or that start off OK but wind up overstaying their welcome. There are some

effective moments in the show ("Oh Peter, or the Day We Became New Yorkers," "Smoke, Smoke," "Stonewall Girls," "The Dream"), but the show could really use a tough-minded director or producer to start cutting and replacing the weaker sections. If everything was at the level of the better bits, the show would sparkle. The cast—not to mention the audience—deserves more than it's getting at present.

The show's most engaging performer, John-Andrew Morrison—sly, seductive, playful, ebullient—is a find. I enjoyed his offhand banter with the audience—helping warm up the crowd before the show actually started—more than the show itself. And it was fun when the percussionist caught his kicks and shimmies. (Not that the percussionist always managed to catch them.) Rolfe Winkler added an appealingly fresh-faced charm. (He lists among his special skills: "Can explain the housing/financial crisis in under a minute"—which I think I might have enjoyed witnessing more than some scenes in the show). Patti Goettlicher gets a nice moment as an evolving NYU student. And Charlie Parker gamely, good-naturedly makes as much as possible out of the material she's given. The night's "special guest-star" sang a tiresome, repetitive folk/rock song she'd written about how she was "getting kinda queasy" over some guy; she repeated the word "queasy" so many times, I definitely was feeling the song.

(Pictured John-Andrew Morrison, Patti Goettlicher and Charlie Parker)

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