

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

A Good 3 Years and 6 Months

David Sheward · Thursday, April 17th, 2025

The Broadway premiere of *The Last Five Years* at the Hudson, Jason Robert Brown's two-character tuner chronicling the romance, marriage and break-up of novelist Jamie and actress Cathy, is a mixed affair. (The intimate musical debuted Off-Broadway in 2002, was revived by Second Stage in 2013, and was made into a movie in 2014.) Boy-band heartthrob Nick Jonas gives an uneven performance, his co-star Adrienne Warren is on point throughout, and director Whitney White's staging is mostly smooth but at times muddies the show's central conceit.



Adrienne Warren and Nick Jonas in *The Last Five Years*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy

Brown's clever structure underlines the central theme of missed connections. The show is mostly sung-through with each character expressing their emotions in alternating solos. Cathy starts by reading Jamie's break-up letter and moves backwards in time while Jamie opens with his excitement at their first meeting and proceeds forwards over the half-decade of their union. In the original, the only time they appear onstage together is in the middle when they marry. For this production, the leads silently appear in each other's scenes. Whether this was White's or Brown's

decision, it confuses the dual timeline and lessens the impact of their one duet, the only moment in the show when their affections overlap. Otherwise, White's direction flows freely from song to song with the aide of David Zinn's suggestive, mobile sets and Stacey Derosier's mood-focusing lighting.



Adrienne Warren and Nick Jonas in *The Last Five Years*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy

The stars are both talented, capable performers, but Warren consistently conveys the varying emotions beneath her songs while Jonas doesn't come up to full subtextual strength until half-way through the score. There's no excuse for Jonas' half-baked performance. He's not just some lightweight pop teen idol. He's been on Broadway since he was a child, appearing in *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Les Miserables*, as well as replacing Daniel Radcliffe in the 2011 *How to Succeed* revival. So he should know what he's doing.

The trouble starts with Jamie's first number "Shiksa Goddess," a funny litany of the Jewish girls he has dated before finding the Gentile Cathy. Jonas has no comic timing here and misses all the laughs. The same with his next song, "Moving Too Fast" where he seems more interested in hitting and holding high notes than in conveying Jamie's anxiety over success in his work and love life coming too quickly. Stacey Derosier has provided a bank of light bulbs on the back wall which do the emotional work Jonas fails to enact by popping on and off at appropriate moments.



Nick Jonas in *The Last Five Years*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy

Jonas finally finds his feet after the shared honeymoon scene with “A Miracle Would Happen” in which Jamie comically reveals his frustration that now that he’s married, women find him attractive. He hits the gags and finds the humor in Jamie’s ironic situation rather than just sustaining notes. (By the way, I found it hard to believe Jonas as the somewhat nerdy Jamie. Donning a pair of glasses and carrying a tote bag from the Strand Bookstore failed to convincingly transform the sexy heartthrob into a serious, unsure-of-himself author.) From this midway point, Jonas captures Jamie’s rising unhappiness with his marriage and his ambivalence towards Cathy, still loving her, but unable to tolerate her insecurities.



Adrienne Warren in *The Last Five Years*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy

Meanwhile, Warren, a Tony winner for dynamically playing Tina Turner, fully exposes Cathy's conflicting feelings in every one of her songs. In her opening "Still Hurting" she is a walking raw wound. In "See I'm Smiling," we see her joy at Jamie joining her during a summer stock gig in Ohio, and then she gradually peels back the surface layers of cheerfulness to reveal her anger when he leaves early to attend a literary function. She's funny in "A Summer in Ohio," listing the drawbacks of small-time stage work and her bizarre castmates including a snake named Wayne, and heartbreaking during a riotous audition sequence civilizing her scrambled inner thoughts while trying out for a musical. White gives her clever business during these two numbers, such as having her pull props out of a bottomless trunk in the former and including an onstage accompanist for Warren to react to in the latter.

Tom Murray's musical direction effectively delivers Brown's multiple styles and Dede Ayite designed the beautiful costumes (I especially enjoyed Cathy's gorgeous wedding dress.)

For *The Last Five Years* to succeed, both players must deliver equally vibrant turns. Here we only get one and half, so it's more like a strong three years and six months.

April 6—June 22. Hudson Theater, 141 W. 44th St., NYC. Running time: 90 minutes with no intermission. thehudsononbroadway.com.

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