

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Falsettos, the Musical That's Here to Stay

Sylvie · Wednesday, April 24th, 2019

Much like the unconventional family in William Finn and James Lapine's *Falsettos*, this is a musical that you might say is constantly regrouping. It started off-Broadway way back in 1979 as *In Trousers*, which inspired a reinvention as *March of the Falsettos* (1981), followed by another reinvention as *Falsettoland* (1990), with a fusion of all the pieces (or parts of them) landing on Broadway in 1992 simply as *Falsettos*.

Miraculously, in 2016 a vibrant Lincoln Center Theater revival of *Falsettos* emerged relatively unscathed from all the cutting and pasting. Now touring, the production, currently on The Ahmanson stage, delivers a triumphantly resilient family accommodation for the 21st century that is fresh and mostly upbeat. But don't get carried away by all the good news. It also is longer than it needs to be. Tweeting, texting and emailing, among other distractions, have eroded whatever patience audiences possessed in the previous century. Clocking in at close to three hours, *Falsettos* could lose one sixth of its length and be strengthened by the loss, especially as it brushes perilously close to melodrama in its second half.



l-r, Max Von Essen & Nick Adams in *Falsettos* at The Ahmanson Theatre.

But enough with the disassembling and reassembling. This *Falsettos* earns the right to be called *Rightsettos*. The staging by Lapine, who has been with the show almost from the very start and is credited as co-writer of the book on this iteration, is as agile, acrobatic and exciting as ever, and set designer David Rockwell has provided an ingenious center stage cube, that the cast breaks apart and reassembles to create varied locations — just as the family at the heart of this musical recombines itself to satisfy whatever its needs of the moment might be.



l-r, Eden Espinosa, Thatcher Jacobs & Max Von Essen in *Falsettos* at The Ahmanson Theatre.

Finn's lyrics and music are as clever and wise as ever, and Spencer Liff's superb rubber-band choreography, joyfully permeates almost all of this entirely sung semi-operatic show. Much like its earlier versions, this *Falsettos* manages, warts and all, to unpack surprise and fun. What it lacks in perfection, it compensates for as a glorious anthem to our flawed humanity.



l-r, Thatcher Jacobs & Nick Blaemire in *Falsettos* at The Ahmanson Theatre.

Marvin (an effortless and refreshingly uncomplicated performance from Max Von Essen), is the man who leaves his wife Trina (the terrific Eden Espinosa) and their pre-teen son (Thatcher Jacobs, outstanding in his many moods) for the love of a man named Whizzer (played with selfish, happy-go-lucky abandon by Nick Adams).

Things get more complex when Trina falls for Marvin's psychiatrist Mendel (the sage but mostly funny Nick Blaemire) and when the uncommon foursome is joined in friendship by the lesbian couple of Dr. Charlotte (Bryonha Marie Parham) and her partner Cordelia (Audrey Cardwell), a sweet lady whose modest goal in life is to bake something, anything, that any other human being might remotely wish to eat.

If you think this morsel of humor sounds a bit forced, you're right. The same could be said about the show's slow start (the two seats next to me were vacated at the intermission) and an overextended second half that, in personalizing the devastation of the AIDS epidemic, works hard to legitimize the sudden mood change.



l-r, Audrey Cardwell & Bryonha Marie Parham in *Falsettos* at The Ahmanson Theatre.

Should we call *Falsettos* a show with selective appeal? Bad idea. It's a strong, often transcendent, mostly ebullient show, true to its times and an eye-opener that has earned its repeated successes. But it's also important to acknowledge that not everyone may be ready for its core invitation: the acceptance of a broader definition of "family" as any inclusive combination of people who love each other, regardless of race, gender or biological linkage.

Top image: the cast of Falsettos at The Ahmanson Theatre.

Photos by Joan Marcus

WHAT: The Lincoln Center Theater production of *Falsettos*.

WHERE: Ahmanson Theatre, Music Center, 135 N. Grand Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90012.

WHEN: Tuesdays-Fridays, 8pm; Saturdays, 2 & 8pm; Sundays, 1 & 6:30pm. Ends May 19. NO public performance Wednesday, 4/24. ADDED 2pm performance on 5/16. NO 6:30pm performance 5/19.

HOW: Tickets, \$30-\$135 (subject to change.), available online at CenterTheatreGroup.org, by phone at 213.972.4400 or in person at the box office. Groups: 213.972.7231. Deaf community: Info & charge at CenterTheatreGroup.org/ACCESS.

RUNNING TIME: 3 hours with an intermission.

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