

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jump for Jonathan and Jeremy

David Sheward · Monday, May 19th, 2025

The 2024-25 Broadway season closes out with a pair of wildly divergent musicals featuring stunning star turns by two of the musical theater's brightest stars. Jonathan Groff is a true triple threat, singing, dancing, and acting his ass off as the tragically short-lived legendary crooner Bobby Darin in *Just in Time* while Jeremy Jordan goes to the opposite extreme, delivering an inspiring vocal and dramatic performance as a Kentucky cave explorer trapped in one position underground in Lincoln Center Theater's revival of *Floyd Collins*. While Groff and Jordan are flawless, their shows vary in intent and execution. *Just in Time* is pure entertainment while *Floyd Collins* is muddled in its messaging.



Jonathan Groff in *Just in Time*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman

The creatives behind *Just in Time* could have built the show following a familiar blueprint. Bobby Darin was a magnetic pop superstar who briefly challenged Sinatra and Presley as king of all media. He was a teen-idol recording and movie star in his 20s, but his weak heart led to an early death at 37. Warren Leight and Isaac Oliver's book is somewhat melodramatic, but focuses on

celebrating Darin's phenomenal talent, largely with humor. Their clever format stages Darin's meteoric rise and tragic fall as a floor show (Ted Chapin is credited with the original concept). Set designer Derek McLane has exquisitely refitted the Circle in the Square as a glamorous 1950s nightclub complete with cabaret-style tables. Director Alex Timbers and choreographer Shannon Lewis have staged the proceedings with speed and ingenuity. Scenes of Darin's chaotic show-biz and personal life are interspersed with spectacular numbers he made famous such as the title tune from *Bells Are Ringing*, "Mack the Knife," "Splish Splash" and "Dream Lover," beautifully orchestrated by Andrew Resnick and Michael Thurber.



Christine Cornish, Jonathan Groff,
and Julia Grondin in *Just in Time*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman

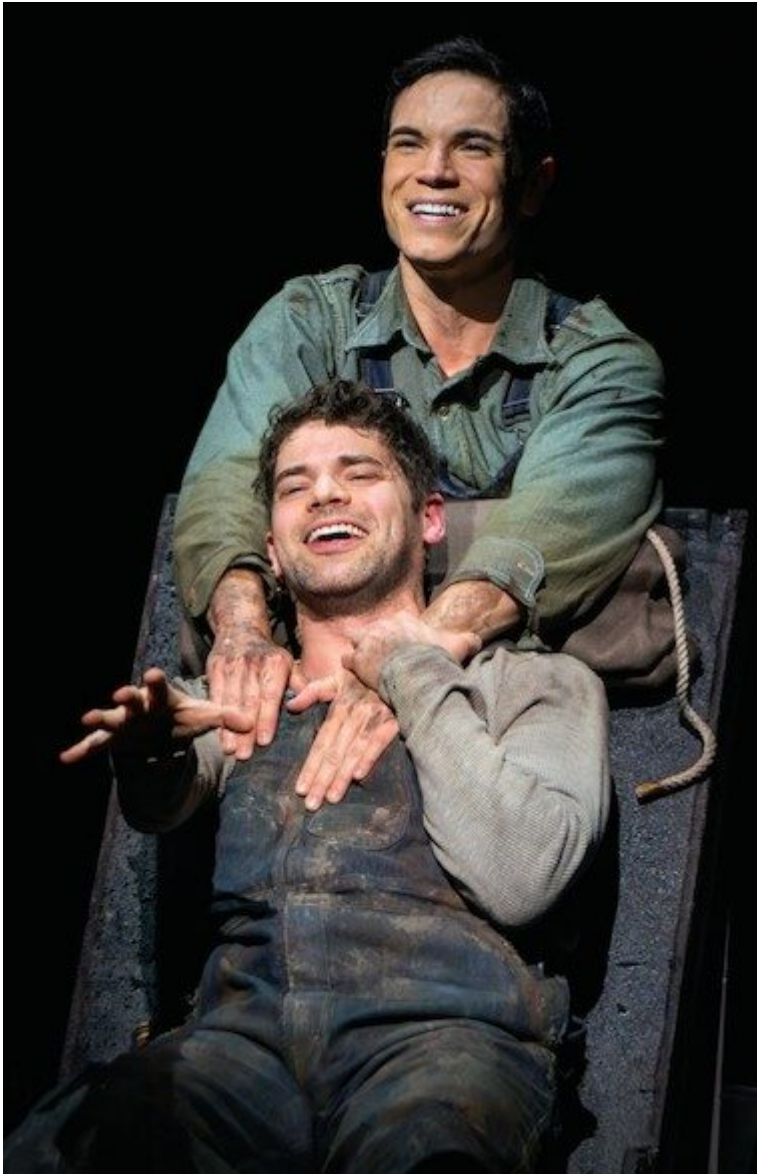
In order for this gimmick to work, you need a supremely gifted star and Groff is it. He grabs the audience from his first breathtaking entrance, emerging from beneath McLane's gorgeous bandstand on an elevator. He is introduced not as Darin, but in his own person. Then he jokes about the setting ("I love playing the basement of *Wicked*"), explains the premise, and then seamlessly launches into the first exuberant number, establishing this will be a fun evening, not a dark dirge. Groff is amazing, soulfully and energetically putting across song after song, executing Lewis' razzle-dazzle dance steps and delivering a fully-realized portrait of the charming, brash, arrogant, yet lovable Darin.



Gracie Lawrence in *Just in Time*.

Credit: Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman

But this is not a one-man show. Groff is supported by a sterling ensemble. Gracie Lawrence exhibits impressive pipes as Connie Francis, Darin's first love and fellow chart-topper. As his wife Sandra Dee, Erika Henningsen conveys the depth beneath the Gidget-next-door image. Michele Pawk strikes sparks as Polly, his tough-as-nails mother, and Emily Bergl impressively doubles as his sister who has a family secret and as Sandra's protective mother. Joe Barbara, Lance Roberts and Caesar Samayoa excel in multiple roles while Valeria Yamin, Christine Cornish, and Julia Grondin dazzle as a trio of showgirls, exquisitely outfitted by costume designer Catherine Zuber, who serve as a kind of Vegas Greek chorus.



Jason Gotay and Jeremy Jordan in *Floyd Collins*.

Credit: Joan Marcus

Just in Time just wants us to have a great time and succeeds, but *Floyd Collins* tries to impart too many themes and leaves us confused. Originally presented Off-Broadway in 1996 for a brief run by Playwrights Horizons in their tiny theater (they've since moved to more spacious digs), *Collins* features a memorable, lush score by Adam Guettel, but a muddled book by Tina Landau who also directed and provided additional lyrics. She has staged the current revival which feels lost in the cavernous Vivian Beaumont. The plot focuses on the true story of the title character, an enterprising young explorer who became trapped in an underground tunnel while seeking a natural cavern to exploit for tourism in poverty-stricken 1925 Kentucky.

It's not clear what Landau is trying to say here. Is it that the burgeoning media circus surrounding Floyd's plight foretells our modern exploitative pop culture? Is that dreamers are crushed by corporations as Floyd is crushed by rocks? (The federal government eventually takes over the land Floyd sought to develop as an attraction.) Is it that Floyd's big ambitions are at odds with his farmer father who can't understand why he wants to crawl under the ground instead of growing crops above it. Landau introduces several messages and as a result none emerges clearly.



Lizzy McAlpine and Jeremy Jordan in *Floyd Collins*.

Credit: Joan Marcus

Landau has also dug herself into a hole, figuratively as well as literally. Once Floyd is trapped after the expositional first number, apart from fantasy and flashback sequences, he is stationary throughout the rest of the show. Guettel gives him long, reflective arias to warble while immobile and flat on his back. Despite being sung by the magnificently expressive Jeremy Jordan, several minutes from these solos could be cut without losing any impact.

Jordan does yeoman's work in the challenging title role, delivering a rainbow of colors to Floyd's passionate yearning, nostalgic recollections with his brother Homer, and his special connection to his sister Nelly, recently discharged from an asylum. But even he cannot overcome the show's shortcomings. The mobile cast members worthy of praise are Jason Gotay's earnest Homer, Lizzy McAlpine's heartbreaking and sweet Nellie, Taylor Trench's compassionate reporter Skeets Miller, Marc Kudisch's conflicted father, Jessica Molaskey's caring stepmother, and Sean Allen Krill's overbearing engineer.

As a director, Landau does her best to bring vibrant life to this confused, static story, but doesn't quite make it. Lighting designer Scot Zielinski masterfully transforms the suggestive set by the design team dots into Floyd's labyrinthine underground maze.



Elizabeth Stanley, Eliza Parelle, Matt Rodin, and Jon-Michael Reese in *All the World's a Stage*.

Credit: Richard Termine

Off-Broadway, a smaller-scale musical attempts to put across a timely take on a relevant issue and largely has positive, if somewhat preachy results. *All the World's a Stage*, presented by Keen Company at Theater Row Theater, employs a sparkling cast and tuneful orchestra of four each to tell the tale of a gay high school teacher in 1990s rural Pennsylvania reaching out to a misfit student through their mutual love of the theater. Adam Gwon's score is enchanting and clever while his book is mostly heartfelt if occasionally reminiscent of an Afterschool Special in its overearnestness. Jonathan Silverstein's staging steers clear of stereotypes and moves smoothly with flowing transitions. Matt Rodin movingly portray Rick, the closeted teacher. Jon-Michael Reese juggles flamboyance with fierceness as Michael, his boyfriend and the owner of queer-friendly bookshop. Elizabeth Stanley pours tons of emotion into the role of a supportive school secretary, but would she be bursting in copious tears over the plight of a work acquaintance? As Sam (short for Samantha) the alienated student, Eliza Parelle is the find of this show. She runs the proverbial gamut from rebellious brat to shattered loner in song and speech. She's the heart of this heartfelt intimate piece, a musical celebrating the love of the stage.

***Just in Time:* April 26—Nov. 30. Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St., NYC. Running time: two hours 30 mins. including intermission. telecharge.com.**

***Floyd Collins:* April 21—June 22. Lincoln Center Theater at the Vivian Beaumont Theater, 150 W. 65th St., NYC. Running time: two hours and 30 mins. including intermission. lct.org.**

***All the World's a Stage:* April 15—May 10. Keen Company at Theater Row Theater, 410 W. 42nd St., NYC. Running time: 100 mins. with no intermission. bfanny.org.**

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