

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

“Love Actually Live” Delights for an Encore Run at the Wallis

Steve Gottfried · Thursday, December 19th, 2019

“Love Actually Live” returns to the Wallis Center for the Performing Arts for a limited engagement (now through December 31st) to bring this beloved and unabashedly gooey Christmas rom-com back to life. Last year’s production was an unqualified artistic and box office hit and many of the original cast are back for an encore. For those unfamiliar with the 2003 movie, the storyline interweaves the lives of various characters (eighteen in all) and how love (or the lack thereof) weaves its way through their lives. The movie starred a cavalcade of now-familiar faces and reads like a who’s who of celebrated British actors (including three subsequent Oscar recipients) from Hugh Grant to Colin Firth and Emma Thompson. The concept of mining the soundtrack of popular movies and turning them into live, staged, multi-media spectacles comes to us courtesy of For the Record. Their first foray into this genre focused on bringing the work of various directors to life in a live staged musical format. The productions started in small venues but the inventive mix of live entertainment with iconic films and top tier talent earned them a reputation and a devoted following which expanded to a national and then an international franchise.



Rex Smith reprises his role as Billy Mack in “Love Actually Live.”

With 28 recognizable songs from the soundtrack — including the Beatles’ “All You Need is Love” and Joni Mitchell’s “Both Sides Now” to the Pointer Sisters’ “Jump (For my Love)” — there’s a little something for everyone. Performed with gusto and spread out over 2 acts and a generous pairing of clips from the movie, “Love Actually Live” is a full-frontal assault on the holiday blues. The most challenging part for the audience is keeping the different characters straight. Fortunately,

the program includes a diagram of the original actors from the movie and their relationship to each other alongside the actor who's performing the role. It may seem a little confusing, but it all comes together quite nicely.



Carrie Manolakos dazzles as Natalie in “Love Actually Live.”

While last year's production set the bar exceedingly high, this year's performers are exceptional in their own right. Standouts include Broadway belter and viral sensation Carrie Manolakos as Natalie, the Prime Minister's staffer and eventual love interest. Manolakos' vocals reach a crescendo at the end of the first act on the Kelly Clarkson torch song “The Trouble with Love.” Another stellar performance comes courtesy of Rogelio Douglas Jr. as Peter (the groom whose best man falls for his bride) who slays with a show-stopping rendition of “White Christmas.” And Rex Smith holds nothing back as past-his-prime rock star Billy Mack. While some of the storylines have begun to show their age in the intervening years since the movie was released in 2003, there's much to enjoy with this holiday favorite if you're able to check your 2019 woke sensibilities at the door and let the nostalgia wash over you.

photo credits: Kevin Parry

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