

# VARIETY

## Review: 'Finian's Rainbow'

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It is an aural pleasure listening to the emotion-rich voice of Andrea Marcovicci surround such musical gems as "How Are Things in Glocca Morra" and "Look to the Rainbow." In fact, the whole melodious Burton Lane/E.Y. Harburg score to "Finian's Rainbow" still weaves its magic 50 years after its Broadway premiere. Unfortunately, the show's complicated, two-tiered plot is not served well by the often clumsy staging by Will Mackenzie, who, along with Jerome Kass, has adapted the book to accommodate a cast performing primarily with scripts in hand.

"Finian's Rainbow" possesses all the sprightly lightheartedness of a Gaelic fable, imbued with leprechauns, a pot of gold, finding true love and searching for one's dream just beyond the rainbow. But entwining itself throughout this tale is the authors' monumentally forward-thinking condemnation of bigotry and economic inequity that permeated the times.

In this limited-run concert stage version, Irish scamp Finian's (William Biff McGuire) impish quest for wealth and the racist machinations of the Southern autocrat, Sen. Rawkins (Robert Mandan), are mouthed without much conviction. Unlike Broadway's Best in Concert previous success (the Jason Alexander-starring "Promises, Promises") "Finian's Rainbow" loses too much as a reading. It needs the reinforcement of a more thoroughly staged production and the often-tentative line readings further undermine the flow of this presentation.

The action is set in the mythical Rainbow Valley in the state of Missitucky, somewhere near Fort Knox. That neer-do-well Finian has fled his Irish homeland with his adoring but long-suffering daughter, Sharon (Marcovicci). He has stolen a pot of gold from his native leprechauns, believing that the gold will multiply if he buries it in the proximity of Fort Knox. Fortuitously, Finian becomes a partner in the small farm of the manly Woody Mahoney (Rex Smith) and Woody's effervescent younger sister, Susan (Dana Stackpole), who cannot speak but communicates with her dancing feet. Naturally, Sharon and Woody fall immediately in love, much to the glee of Finian.

Complicating the path of true love is the arrival of the leprechaun Og (Malcolm Gets), desperate to recover the stolen gold before he loses his fairy status and is transformed into a human. And on the darker side, Sen. Rawkins is attempting to gain possession of Woody's farmland by utilizing the racist laws of the day.

All plots eventually turn on the magical powers of the hidden gold, which transforms Rawkins into a black man (Jeff Coopwood), gives Susan the power of speech so she can declare her love for the now happily human Og and, finally, gives the now-married Sharon and Woody the economic security to provide work and homes for black and white folk alike. Finian, of course, goes off in search of new rainbows and new adventures.

What's lacking in the production's thematic execution is almost made up for by the music. Gets soars through the delightful "Something Sort of Grandish" and is comically masterful with "When I'm Not Near the Girl I Love." Smith's crooning style, despite a few intonation problems, offers a sensual rendition of "Old Devil Moon" and joins Marcovicci in a playful rendition of "If This Isn't Love."

One musical high point is provided by Cleo King, whose pile driver performance of "Necessity" is a true show stopper. Another highlight is provided by Coopwood's racially converted Sen. Rawkins, who is joined by the Gospellers (Marvin Thornton, Robert Barry Fleming and Elex Lee Vann) in the foot-stomping, revival ditty, "The Begat."

Janet Watson's choreography is simple but highly effective, especially in the ensemble numbers, "We're Having a Party" and "The Great Come-and-get Day." And Stackpole's dancing Susan floats about the stage with a haunting blend of sensuality and guileless innocence. Her spritelike "Dance of the Golden Crock" is a high point of the second act.

Peter Matz' onstage 11-piece orchestra performs competently but often sounds malnourished, especially Matz's undervolumed synthesizer. Much of the blame for this may lie in the curiously unbalanced sound reinforcement provided by Jon Gottlieb and Philip G. Allen. On opening night, only three members of the quartet performing "The Begat" had their voices amplified.