

THEATER REVIEW: Cast makes ‘Enter Laughing’ enjoyable in today’s world

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted Feb 27, 2018 at 2:31 PM

Taking a 1960s Broadway farce that could easily collapse into a heap of cliches and dated jokes, and transforming it into a fast-paced comedic shot at wanna-be actors and the industry that feeds them, the Salem State University theater department brought Joseph Stein’s “Enter Laughing” back to life at the Sophia Gordon Center Thursday evening.

If you go...

WHAT: “Enter Laughing”

WHERE: Sophia Gordon Center, Salem State University, 356 Lafayette St.

WHEN: through March 4

TICKETS: \$20, \$15 seniors/students, under 18 free. Visit www.salemstatetickets.com or call 978-542-6365.

Taking a 1960s Broadway farce that could easily collapse into a heap of cliches and dated jokes, and transforming it into a fast-paced comedic shot at wanna-be actors and the industry that feeds them, the Salem State University theater department brought Joseph Stein’s “Enter Laughing” back to life at the Sophia Gordon Center Thursday evening.

At first glance, the play had all the hallmarks of a work whose time had passed: the autobiographical tale (written by Carl Reiner) of a dreamy Jewish boy with meddling parents and a bushel full of dreams, who wants to be an actor and hilariously takes lots of low-stakes risks to

become one.

Even though smart acting and great concepts cannot rescue every script, director David Allen George and his ensemble certainly saved this one. Ryan Doyle shone as the slightly nebbish, totally compelling David Kolowitz, who delivers packages by day but dreams of a Broadway career at night.

The play has had multiple iterations: its 1960s one-year run on Broadway, and several revivals as a musical and as a film since then. George took a bit of everything to make this work: this production is not a musical, but the recorded music that accompanies the integrated set changes — campy choices, but not cornball, selected by sound designer Devin McGovern — made the period-piece feel integrated throughout the performance.

Accents — this is an all-Jewish cast — were present, but not insistent or phony. Costuming was period, but did not draw attention to itself. The lighting was effective but also understated.

The sets — the crew may love the sleek new machinery in the Sophia Gordon Center just a little too much — were terrific: a half-dozen rotating looks, with the rotation itself between scenes being part of the concept.

During scene changes, parts of each of the various sets would rotate through the visual space, even if they weren't part of the upcoming scene. At first it seemed like a mistake, but as the work played on, it served to yoke all the action together in a subtle way.

Doyle stole the spotlight, and he had to. The success of “Enter Laughing” depends on his malleable face, attitude and skills, as he convinces his parents, his girlfriends, his buddies, his director, his boss — and himself — that he's got what it takes to be an actor.

He doesn't. But the dream never dies, and his painful attempts to bring his one love scene to life — culminating in a broken-down first night performance, full of off-the-wall improvisation — link the action from beginning to end.

The script lets everyone get a moment or two in the spotlight, and some of the large cast of players did not let those moments slip by. Kolowitz's worrisome parents — played by Jacqui Dupre and Joshua Ray — had some of the best moments. “You can do whatever you want,” Dupre says at one point to her ambitious son, and everyone understands the many thousand implications of that phrase from her tone and body language.

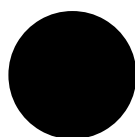
Chelsea Titchenell — bringing a lot of Marilyn to the role of Kolowitz’s leading lady — Tim Etzel as his clueless buddy and confidant, and Demi DiCarlo as Kolowitz’s never-say-die girlfriend had great moments as well. Jeremy Laroche channeled deep into his shop-owner’s character.

The script loses some energy in the second half of the production, when David’s dreams and reality come closer together. This book works great as a comedy, and less well as a life lesson. Using stereotypes for humor can easily slide down the slope toward xenophobia, or worse.

But an insightful actor portraying an immigrant shopkeeper (Laroche) can repeat the line “Oy, America,” and come off sounding homesick and sweet, instead of hopelessly out of touch with his new culture. George’s directorship, and the talented troupe he’s put together, make “Enter Laughing” an affectingly funny look at the past.

Salem State University presents Joseph Stein’s “Enter Laughing” at the Sophia Gordon Center through March 4. For tickets and information visit www.salemstatetickets.com or call 978-542-6365.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR’s ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com



SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL

Wake up to the day’s top news, delivered to your inbox

THEATER REVIEW: Cast makes ‘Enter Laughing’ enjoyable in today’s world

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted Feb 27, 2018 at 2:31 PM

Taking a 1960s Broadway farce that could easily collapse into a heap of cliches and dated jokes, and transforming it into a fast-paced comedic shot at wanna-be actors and the industry that feeds them, the Salem State University theater department brought Joseph Stein’s “Enter Laughing” back to life at the Sophia Gordon Center Thursday evening.

If you go...

WHAT: “Enter Laughing”

WHERE: Sophia Gordon Center, Salem State University, 356 Lafayette St.

WHEN: through March 4

TICKETS: \$20, \$15 seniors/students, under 18 free. Visit www.salemstatetickets.com or call 978-542-6365.

Taking a 1960s Broadway farce that could easily collapse into a heap of cliches and dated jokes, and transforming it into a fast-paced comedic shot at wanna-be actors and the industry that feeds them, the Salem State University theater department brought Joseph Stein’s “Enter Laughing” back to life at the Sophia Gordon Center Thursday evening.

At first glance, the play had all the hallmarks of a work whose time had passed: the autobiographical tale (written by Carl Reiner) of a dreamy Jewish boy with meddling parents and a bushel full of dreams, who wants to be an actor and hilariously takes lots of low-stakes risks to become one.

Even though smart acting and great concepts cannot rescue every script, director David Allen George and his ensemble certainly saved this one. Ryan Doyle shone as the slightly nebbish, totally compelling David Kolowitz, who delivers packages by day but dreams of a Broadway career at night.

The play has had multiple iterations: its 1960s one-year run on Broadway, and several revivals as a musical and as a film since then. George took a bit of everything to make this work: this production is not a musical, but the recorded music that accompanies the integrated set changes — campy choices, but not cornball, selected by sound designer Devin McGovern — made the period-piece feel integrated throughout the performance.

Accents — this is an all-Jewish cast — were present, but not insistent or phony. Costuming was period, but did not draw attention to itself. The lighting was effective but also understated.

The sets — the crew may love the sleek new machinery in the Sophia Gordon Center just a little too much — were terrific: a half-dozen rotating looks, with the rotation itself between scenes being part of the concept.

During scene changes, parts of each of the various sets would rotate through the visual space, even if they weren't part of the upcoming scene. At first it seemed like a mistake, but as the work played on, it served to yoke all the action together in a subtle way.

Doyle stole the spotlight, and he had to. The success of “Enter Laughing” depends on his malleable face, attitude and skills, as he convinces his parents, his girlfriends, his buddies, his director, his boss — and himself — that he's got what it takes to be an actor.

He doesn't. But the dream never dies, and his painful attempts to bring his one love scene to life — culminating in a broken-down first night performance, full of off-the-wall improvisation — link the action from beginning to end.

The script lets everyone get a moment or two in the spotlight, and some of the large cast of players did not let those moments slip by. Kolowitz's worrisome parents — played by Jacqui Dupre and Joshua Ray — had some of the best moments. “You can do whatever you want,” Dupre says at one point to her ambitious son, and everyone understands the many thousand implications of that phrase from her tone and body language.

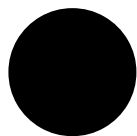
Chelsea Titchenell — bringing a lot of Marilyn to the role of Kolowitz's leading lady — Tim Etzel as his clueless buddy and confidant, and Demi DiCarlo as Kolowitz's never-say-die girlfriend had great moments as well. Jeremy Laroche channeled deep into his shop-owner's character.

The script loses some energy in the second half of the production, when David's dreams and reality come closer together. This book works great as a comedy, and less well as a life lesson. Using stereotypes for humor can easily slide down the slope toward xenophobia, or worse.

But an insightful actor portraying an immigrant shopkeeper (Laroche) can repeat the line “Oy, America,” and come off sounding homesick and sweet, instead of hopelessly out of touch with his new culture. George's directorship, and the talented troupe he's put together, make “Enter Laughing” an affectingly funny look at the past.

Salem State University presents Joseph Stein's "Enter Laughing" at the Sophia Gordon Center through March 4. For tickets and information visit www.salemstatetickets.com or call 978-542-6365.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com



SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL

Wake up to the day's top news, delivered to your inbox
