

WHAT THE CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT FAME

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'Fame' Passes Stage Test

Scale of Musical's choreography and staging matches that of its protagonists' aspirations

Cats, we are told, have nine lives. As of this time, "Fame" has already had three; as a smash hit 1980 motion picture, a long running TV series and now as "Fame - The Musical," a staged rock musical spectacular at Hollywood's Pantages Theatre through Sunday.

And it's still terrific: a big boisterous, charged show that is full of spirit and energy. It's also a tribute to the notion that with teachers who really care, young motivated, American students from all walks of life can achieve success. Or in this case, fame.

As conceived by David DeSilva (a.k.a. "Father Fame" and a New York educator), with book by Jose Fernandez, lyrics by Jaques Levy and music by Steve Margoshes, "Fame - The Musical" incorporates a couple of our pervasive American myths; that of the melting pot coupled with the notion that the American dream can be fulfilled with hard work and a lot of sweat.

Of course, it also helps if you have talent. These students have talent galore, only it's still raw and they need the discipline to channel it. That's where the caring staff of instructors come in, including English teacher Miss Ester Sherman (Regina Le Vert) and dance instructor Miss Greta Bell (Sophina Brown). Add strong support from drama teacher Mr. Myers (Richard C. Rodgers) and music teacher Mr. Sheinkopf (Herman Petras).

Set in the 1980's in New York's High School for the Performing Arts on West 46th St., "Fame - The Musical" focuses on the dreams, hopes and aspirations of a group of talented and

motivated students and their four-year odyssey at the school. Credit Norbert Kolb for the three tiered set, Paul Tazwell for the colorful costumes and Richard Winkler for the effective lighting.

All of the students are outstanding as they dance (there are at least 10 big company dance numbers), sing (from rock to rap) and act their way through four years of high school: serious Nick (Darren Ritchie); ugly duckling Serena (Sheri Sanders); showoff Jose (Jose Restrepo); restless Carmen (Natasha Neary); chunky Mabel (Catrice Joseph); girl drummer Lambchops (Amy Ehrlich); gentle Schlomo (Carl Tromon); streetwise and dyslexic Tyrone (Dwayne Chattman); ballerina Iris (Jessica Cohen); and trumpet player Goody (Jason Maniscalco).

Credit Lars Bethke for the savvy direction and choreography that never lose direction or pace. All of it's red hot.

- Ed Kaufman