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### Theatre in Review: Being Audrey (Transport Group/Connelly Theatre)

At the performance I attended, **Jack Cummings III**, the artistic director of Transport Group and the director of *Being Audrey*, described this new musical as "unique." That's putting it mildly.



Photo by Carol Rosegg.

Here's the setup: Claire Stark is a Jewish girl from Pennsylvania turned well-

off New York matron of a certain age. We are told that her existence is perfect and that she worships Audrey Hepburn. When her husband, Larry, has a cardiac event, Claire, unable to cope and afraid that she has no identity outside her marriage, slips into a fugue state. She imagines herself as an Audrey Hepburn figure, wandering through a series of episodes recapping the plots of *Roman Holiday*, *Sabrina*, *Funny Face*, and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Personally, I wish they would have included *Charade* -- so somebody could have taken kidnapped her and brought the musical to a merciful end.

An obsession with Audrey Hepburn as a role model is appropriate in, say, a girl of 14. In a woman of 50, it's pathological. We're supposed to see Claire as winsome and witty, a delightful, fragile eccentric; instead, she comes off as monstrously self-involved, worrying only about herself while Larry fades away. Late in the show, after having been reprimanded by several fantasy characters, she tells her ailing husband, "You saved me, and when you needed me the most, I ran away." That's about the size of it. We never learn a thing about the marriage, so it's impossible to grasp her panic.

There's nothing to do but watch Claire wander from one lame movie parody to the next, while Cummings and his choreographer, **Scott Rink**, send the rest of the cast spinning around her with bedpans and room dividers. (God help you if you aren't up on the details of Hepburn's films.) The score consists of inconclusive cocktail-piano studies fitted out with bland lyrics. (The low point is something called "The Beatnook," in which everybody tries to make like a finger-snapping, beret-wearing hipster; it's crazy, man, but not in the way they intended.) Gazing into her husband's eyes, Claire sings, "Can movie love replace the love that you I and both feel?" If I were Larry, I'd get a.) a good heart surgeon, and b.) a divorce lawyer.

Amazingly, this piece has a book writer (**James Hindman**), an additional book credit (**Cheryl Stern**, who plays Claire), and two additional "developers" (Cummings and **Adam R. Perlman**); Stern also supplies supplemental lyrics to the score by **Ellen Weiss**. What on earth did they all do?

Stern works hard at being charming as Claire, but she has no character to play. **Brian Sutherland** adds a little warmth and musical comedy savvy as all the men in her life, but, like everyone else, he's struggling with nonexistent material. The only member of the supporting cast who registers is **Blair Ross**, who manages a passable Kay Thompson imitation in the *Funny Face* sequence.

**Sandra Goldmark's** set design largely consists of diaphanous curtains, plus a hospital bed and those room dividers. **R. Lee Kennedy's** lighting relies rather heavily on backlight effects, leaving the faces unilluminated at times. **Kathryn Rohe's** costumes include a reasonable facsimile of Hepburn's famous Holly Golightly dress. At first, I thought **Michael Rasbury's** sound design was too artificial, but I quickly adjusted to it -- and, in any event, the theatre's acoustics aren't great. He does make use of some nifty effects, including sound bites from Hepburn's films, an impressive explosion, and a ship's horn.

The Transport Group has given us so many fine things -- although to my mind, the company has had better success with drama than with musicals -- that this entire event is deeply mysterious. Still, we'll have to chalk this one up as an example of one of those inexplicable theatre black holes that open up from time to time, taking in even the most talented people. Stay home with a DVD of *Sabrina* instead. --**David Barbour**

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