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Off Broadway

## Being Audrey (Connelly Theater; 99 seats; \$38 top)

By MARILYN STASIO

A Sarah Ackerman, Yael & Nick Jekogian, Amy Kincaid presentation, in association with Michelle Ackerman, Jamie deRoy, Marla Franzese, Ronald & Joanne Falcon, Francesca James, of a Transport Group Theater Company production of a musical in one act with music and lyrics by Ellen Weiss, book by James Hindman, developed with Jack Cummings III and Adam R. Perlman; additional book and lyrics by Cheryl Stern. Directed by Cummings. Musical staging and choreography, Scott Rink. Musical direction, arrangements, and orchestrations, Lanny Meyers.

Claire - Cheryl Stern  
"Fred" - Brian Sutherland



Being Audrey

What would Audrey Hepburn do, if she walked into a performance of "Being Audrey" and saw her cinematic persona being invoked as a quasi-divine font of saving grace? Chances are, that gracious lady would shine her beatific smile on the Transport Group's misguided efforts to make a musical about a woman's attempt to escape the trauma of her husband's heart attack by transporting herself into an alternative reality of film romance. Then the movie legend would gracefully beat it out the door before anyone could ask what she really thought of the show.

A lot of busy hands went into the making of this musical fantasy, which makes it hard to know exactly who came up with the original lamebrained idea and whom to identify as enablers.

Show begins "once upon a time," when Claire (Cheryl Stern), a self-described Jewish American Princess from Altoona, Pa., is happily married to a prince of a guy named Larry who indulges her obsession with Audrey Hepburn movies. But that idyll is all too soon ended when Larry has a heart attack and is carted off to the hospital. Here a bevy of doctors and nurses hook him up to various machines before running off to pester Claire to sign a do-not-resuscitate form.

Unable to take the stress, Claire has an attack of amnesia that leaves her floating outside the real world, fantasizing that she's the heroine of her beloved Hepburn film adventures. Without entirely casting off their medical guises, the ensemble proceeds to whisk Claire through a series of escapist scenes from "Roman Holiday," "Sabrina," "Funny Face" and "Breakfast at Tiffany's."

Since Stern is not the most agile of performers, "whisk" does not do justice to the pulling and tugging that ensues during the leaden production numbers. For a musical inspired by the lightest and frothiest of materials, "Being Audrey" is shockingly earthbound, burdened by lugubrious songs with banal lyrics that do nothing to convey the psychological complexity of Claire's mental state.

Although Hepburn lends her recorded voice to many scenes, there's not a chance anyone would identify that film icon with poor Claire, who smiles like a trouper, but seems to recognize the basic lunacy of the position she's put in by James Hindman's awkwardly contrived book. And while Brian Sutherland is the designated stand-in for all the hunky heroes who romance her in Paris and Rome and on the north shore of Long Island, it's just as unlikely that anyone would mistake this stodgy thesp for the likes of Fred Astaire or William Holden -- or even George Peppard.

Among the overworked ensemble, Mark Ledbetter puts his pipes to best use, while Blair Ross (who is not afraid to play goofy) does a nifty impersonation of Kay Thompson in "Funny Face." But honestly, nobody seems to be having any fun.

Set, Sandra Goldmark; costumes, Kathryn Rohe; lighting, R. Lee Kennedy; **sound, Michael Rasbury**; dramaturg, Adam R. Perlman; production stage manager, Theresa Flanagan. Opened April 5, 2009. Reviewed April 2. Running time: 1 HOUR, 30

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**With:** Stephen Berger, Andrea Bianchi, Valerie Fagan, Mark Ledbetter, Michael Maricondi, Blair Ross.  
**Narrator:** Dominick Dunne.

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