

Snapshots



Northlight Theatre (see Resident companies). Music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. Book by David Stern. Dir. Ken Sawyer. With Susie McMonagle, Gene Weygandt, Megan Long, Nick Cosgrove, Jess Godwin, Tony Clarno. 2hrs 15mins; one intermission.

Repurposing his own songs from the likes of *Pippin*, *Godspell*, *Children of Eden* and *Wicked*, composer Stephen Schwartz, along with book writer David Stern, tries to thread them together into a new story about a married couple at a crossroads. With their only child safely off to college, Sue (Susie McMonagle) is ready to leave her oblivious husband, Dan (Gene Weygandt). Arriving home early from work, Dan finds Sue in their attic looking for her suitcase. Surprised by his arrival, she spills a shoebox full of photos, sparking reminiscences of their life together. They watch their younger selves (played as schoolkids by Megan Long and Nick Cosgrove and as young adults by Jess Godwin and Tony Clarno) act out their extended courtship to Schwartz's score.

It's not a bad concept at its core, but the execution is pretty dreadful.



PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY McMonagle and Weygandt look back on Godwin and Clarno, center.

Stern's book is full of cornball dialogue and middlebrow cliché. Worse, it's structurally flawed, spending far too much time on goofy sight-gag renditions of Sue and Dan's previous partners. We see their own relationship reenacted only after the act break, and then only until the birth of their son. The 18 years hence remain a mystery; we're told of Sue's present frustrations, but never shown. Those Schwartz fans here for the music are likely to be frustrated as well. Though the talented cast more than does justice to Schwartz's '70s folk rock-influenced harmonies, the reams of new lyrics and repurposing for plot reasons often undermine our ability to enjoy the songs on their own merits.—*Kris Vire*

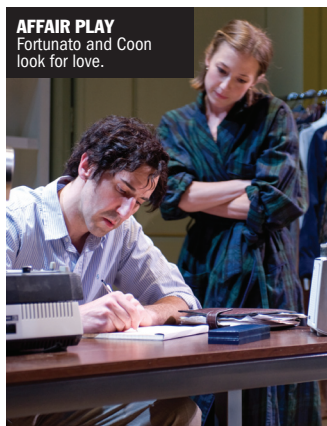
The Real Thing



Writers' Theatre (see Resident companies). By Tom Stoppard. Dir. Michael Halberstam. With ensemble cast. 2hrs 15mins; one intermission.

A writer dedicated to conveying the intricacies of human behavior, Henry (Sean Fortunato) adores pop music for the straightforward honesty he's unable to replicate in his own art. The struggle between emotion and intellect is a constant in Tom Stoppard's work, and Michael Halberstam's production of 1982's *The Real Thing* strikes a balance that fully communicates the powerful insight of Stoppard's multifaceted script.

When Henry leaves his wife for the manipulative but passionate Annie (Carrie Coon), reality begins to reflect art as elements of Henry's writing work their way into his personal life. Stoppard uses Henry, who's obsessed with finding the real in both writing and romance, as a springboard for discussion on both topics. Does putting words on a page with purpose but no talent make someone a writer? If a relationship begins with betrayal and deception, can it be the real thing? Stoppard asks the



AFFAIR PLAY Fortunato and Coon look for love.

questions, then lets the audience create the answers.

Coon's confident, sly Annie is a character in transition. Each affair is an opportunity to find out what she truly wants, and the actor's ability to convey that uncertainty brings the character to a sympathetic place. The versatility and depth of Writers' cast prevent Stoppard's heavily referential dialogue from becoming cold and detached; the ease with which the ensemble accesses the raw emotion beneath the cerebral language is a testament to Halberstam's strong direction.—*Oliver Sava*

PHOTOS: MICHAEL BRISLOW

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