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UPCOMING: Mary and Kiki - Two new musicals

by **Julian Eaves** on 15th July 2017 in **Features, News**

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This week Julian Eaves took a look at two new musicals in development *Mary Stuart* and *Kiki, the Queen of Montparnasse*.



MARY STUART, Karamel Café, Mountview Academy

A lot of drama schools commission new work, and this is one of the primary places to go to find new and exciting musical theatre. That is emphatically what we find here in this remarkable new work in development by German writer and dramaturg, Kolja Schallenberg, and his gifted and

perfectly well-matched composer-collaborator, Paul Glaser. Schallenberg translates Schiller into English here, and while the effect is literary and worthy, in his desire to be 'authentic' and preserve the intention of the original (a rather high-bourgeois, if not actually courtly one – think of Shakespeare, but without the common touch), where this script really scores is in the chunks Schallenberg gives to Glaser to set to music.

There, the magic occurs. The combination of Glaser's contemporary, jazz-infused, gently rock-inflected scoring with Schallenberg's unfancy and yet heroic translations of Schiller's text. The combination is simply irresistible, and even more so when you consider the stunning casting decision to place in a mainly Caucasian cast the royal roles of Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth of England with two established and highly experienced African heritage actors, respectively Jacqui Dubois and Marion Campbell. Not only that, they have miraculous voices with the kind of power and artistry that will hold an audience either in mainstream popular shows or at Ronnie Scott's. This stroke of genius lifts the work into really interesting terrain: their performances clearly mark them apart from the rest of the cast, and their manner of delivery of the music, wholly suited to the style in which their music is composed, is wildly different from the much more straight-laced 'musical theatre' vernacular of the rest of the score, and all the score departs – quite a long way – from the austere rhetorical tenor of the dialogue.

To stage such a work is an incredible challenge. With such a divergence of 'styles' within the same work, it is going to take some time to sort out how best to give physical expression to it. What we have so far is an unobtrusive design of lots of pictureframes in a black box. But the queens wear leather, and heels, and are high-glamour objects – and are immediately much more attractive to audiences. This is going to be a fascinating developmental path to follow. Similarly, deciding what to do with the rest of the cast, and how best to use them physically in such an environment is going to be even more of a challenge. This is a new work to watch with great attention.

Find out more at www.marystuartthemusical.com

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KIKI, THE QUEEN OF MONTPARNASSE **Drayton Arms Theatre**

Meanwhile, a different view of royalty is on offer in this British premiere of a sweetly charming concoction presenting a kind of potted biography of early 20th-century bohemian muse, Alice Prin, who re-invented herself under the name that gives the show its title, in a story brought delightfully to life on the French stage by Herve Devolder and Milena Marinelli (both write book and lyrics, Devolder does the music).

One of Mountview's graduate producers, Mathilde Moulin, is responsible for translating the text with Daniel Cooper, shortening it and getting in Jill Patterson (a Mountview alumna of earlier slightly earlier vintage) to direct. It's an effective one-woman show for the actress taking the part of the waif-makes-good-and-then-loses-it-all-to-drugs-and-booze tale. It has lots of light charm; the songs are pretty pastiches of 1920s, 1930s French popular tunes, without ever quite establishing their own voice.

About Julian Eaves



Julian Eaves. Writes book, music and lyrics of new musicals. Currently working on, 'ISLAND', a contemporary haunted-house, murder-mystery, college-reunion thriller. Recent productions: 'BLIND DATE', Iris Theatre; 'DREAMS THAT MONEY CAN BUY', workshop and showcase at LOST Theatre; 'TINY SHOWS', So-and-So's Arts Club; also work for Chichester Festival Theatre (National Theatre Connections), Courtyard Theatre ('A WINTER'S TALE', dir. Phil Willmott), Arc Theatre, Trowbridge and Harlequin Theatre, Redhill. Previously, Royal Court Young People's Theatre, Edinburgh Fringe ('HYSTERIA!', an original musical with Jessica Martin), National Youth Theatre.

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Daniel Cooper, Herve Devolder, Jacqui Dubois, Jill Patterson, Kiki Queen Of Montparnasse, Kolja Schallenberg, Marion Campbell, Mary Stuart, Mathilde Moulin, Milena Marinelli, Paul Glaser

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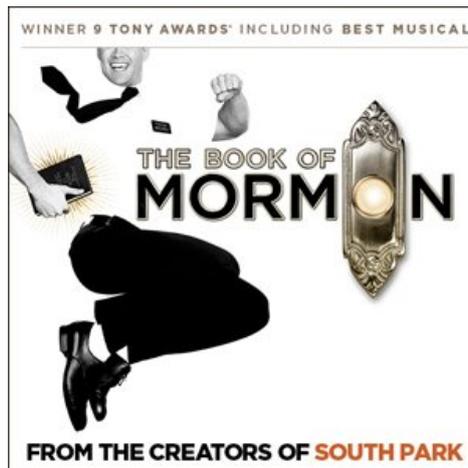


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