

‘Perfect Harmony’ has perfect pitch



Photo by John Howrey

Kelly McCreary, Dana Acheson appear in ‘Perfect Harmony.’

Comedy, acting, singing come together in ‘Perfect Harmony’

By Jenna Scherer / Theater Review
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Boston is well past its heyday as a tryout town for New York-bound shows. But every now and then, we get the chance to pre-sample the good stuff like in the old days.

“Perfect Harmony” at the Stoneham Theatre isn’t headed for the Great White Way, but it is headed for off-Broadway. That’s kind of more fun anyway. The show was a hit when it opened at the New York International Fringe Festival in 2006, and it’s making a stopover in Stoneham before starting an extended run in Manhattan.

Developed by Andrew Grosso (who also directs) and a group of actors at NYU’s venerable Tisch School, “Perfect Harmony” features a whip-smart script and a polished cast to carry it off. Though it’s self-consciously riding the popularity wave of FOX’s “Glee,” it distinguishes itself as an idiosyncratic high school fable all its own.

At a prep school where a cappella singing means everything, two groups have been duking it out for years in the national championships. The all-boy Acafellas always win, and the all-girl Ladies in Red always lose. Both sing an array of hilariously cloying standards - “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun,” “I Think We’re Alone Now” and so forth. Lassiter (Robbie Collier Sublett) becomes obsessed with the artistic relevancy of a cappella, earning him the derision of the group. Queen bee Melody (Dana Acheson) wants all the solos and creative control for herself. Meghan (Kelly McCreary) wants her own moment in the spotlight and also has the hots for Melody’s boyfriend, Jasper (Clayton Apgar).

Those who did time in a school singing group (Full disclosure: Yours truly is a veteran of college a cappella) know how intense things can seem on the inside of this apparently trivial world - the living and dying by who gets the solo, the pitch pipe power trips. “Perfect Harmony” does a great job walking the line between acknowledging how ridiculous these dilemmas are and acknowledging the hormone-fueled sway they hold over the characters.

What makes “Perfect Harmony” borderline brilliant is the combination of a seriously funny script and an ensemble of seriously polished actors. They tap so naturally into the rhythms of Grosso and company’s highly stylized writing, it feels like they’ve really spent years singing and snarking together.

It’s all caricature - the singing jock (Jarid Faubel), the uppity trust fund kid (Kobi Libii), the Russian exchange student (Kate Morgan Chadwick) - but it’s vividly realized caricature, and really smart comedy. It doesn’t hurt that these guys can all belt and blend the pants off the many songs in “Perfect Harmony.”

Grosso’s hit-waiting-to-happen is off to our big brother theater town soon, so do yourself a favor and catch it while it’s in Stoneham. Whether you’ve got your own a cappella war stories or just plain had it rough in high school, “Perfect Harmony” vibes in all the right places.

“PERFECT HARMONY”

At the Stoneham Theatre, Saturday afternoon. Through Oct. 3.



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