

The Stages of MN

## The Wedding Singer is Infectious Fun at Lyric Arts



Photo by Molly Weibel, 1000 Words Photography-MN

So I'm having one of those weeks where I see all sorts of strange little connections and it's as if these things are signs, letting me know I'm on the right path. Last Sunday, I reviewed Minneapolis Musical Theatre's production of *Analog and Vinyl*, in it I mentioned that the first show I saw of theirs was *Be More Chill*, which started me on the path to creating The Stages of MN. *The Wedding Singer* featured two actors I recognized from *Be More Chill*, Caitlin Featherstone and Doni Marinos. Wednesday I reviewed *Tina – The Tina Turner Musical* at the Orpheum, in *The Wedding Singer* there is a Tina Turner impersonator. Saturday my friends and I, collectively known as the Twin Cities Theater Bloggers, are hosting a Prom Date with the TCTB at Chanhassen Dinner Theatres. *The Prom's* music is by Matthew Sklar with lyrics by Chad Beguelin. Three guesses, the first two don't count, who wrote the music and lyrics for *The Wedding Singer*? Ding ding ding that's right! Matthew Sklar and Chad Beguelin. Don't, tell them what they've won, it's a look into the bizarre way in which my mind makes patterns out of coincidences that I can use to justify spending most of my free time going to the theatre and writing about it. You know what else *The Wedding Singer* did? It made me smile, it made me laugh out loud, and it had me tapping my feet

along with the music. One other connection, the first show I ever saw at Lyric Arts was *Rent*, my now wife and I saw it there the weekend we got engaged, tonight we were back in a theatre that acts as a reminder of our wedding to see *The Wedding Singer*.

*The Wedding Singer* is based on the 1998 Adam Sandler film which was written by Tim Herlihy who co-wrote the book for the musical with Beguelin. I have never seen the movie, I suspect I'm in the minority there. I probably will see it now, though I don't expect it to be nearly as good as what I saw on stage at Lyric Arts on Friday. It's your standard rom-com, they rarely do anything that unique. What separates the good ones from the rest isn't a unique plot, but the quality of the humor, the performances, and above everything, whether it gets through your defenses and into your heart. If it doesn't do that, the best jokes in the world are not going to elevate it. In the case of musicals, there are those that feature songs that seem to be improvised. By which I don't mean they feel spontaneous, I mean they have the feel of that segment on *Who's Line is it Anyway?*. Like an accomplishment that they made it work, but not anything your going to leave the theater and start singing along with in the car. Thankfully, *The Wedding Singer* doesn't have that style, it has proper songs that have melodies and choruses. I shouldn't be surprised, *The Prom* doesn't have a bad song in the show. I should know, I've listened to it 237 times. This was my first exposure to the music of *The Wedding Singer*, but based on how caught up in the songs I was during the performance, I suspect it's going to earn multiple slots on my musical playlist when I give the Broadway Cast album a few listens – if Apple Music carried it. I liked the energy and the clever lyrics of the songs as well as the humor in the script. It's not as mature as *The Prom*, but it's very easy to see that they came from the same creative DNA. *The Prom* will make you laugh out loud and let your inner rock star out to jam along with it's toe tapping songs.

What I want to talk about rather than get bogged down in plot are the performances. Chris Paulson as Robbie Hart, the titular wedding singer and Haley Methner as his love interest Julia are both great in their roles. I've been a fan of Paulson since seeing him in *Bright Star* at Lyric Arts several years ago, and his run as *The Guy* in *Once* last season at DalekoArts was fantastic. Methner is new to the Twin Cities and I'm sure we are going to be seeing and hopefully hearing a lot more from her, a very welcome addition to our areas talent pool. But I want to shine a little light on some of the supporting and ensemble roles. Caitlin Featherstone shows off her fantastic dance skills and her talent for broad comedic caricatures with a hilarious take on the baby talking bride. Justin Michael, whom I first saw in *Something Rotten!* at Lyric Arts is the wedding singers bassist and best friend Sammy. Michael's unusual look disarms you against the talent that bombards you once he gets rolling. I'd say he was a surprise but I saw him as *Nostradamus*, so I new he had the goods. Sher U-F as Grandma Rosie should be arrested for theft as she steals every scene she's in. Morgan Kempton is a member of the ensemble who plays the bride at the first wedding that Robbie and his band perform at when the show opens. There is a lot going on in that first scene, lots of dancing and background information coming at you, but all eyes are on Kempton. If there was a moment in this show where you looked at a performer and thought, this moment feels real, it's seeing her in her wedding dress on her wedding day. You see her, the light in her eyes, the smile on her face, and you believe this is the happiest day of her life and that joy makes her the most beautiful person in the entire theatre (except of course my wife). Audrey Johnson plays Holly, Julia's best friend and Sammy's ex-girlfriend, she's got a stunner of a song with "Right in Front of Your Eyes". And finally ensemble member Alex Stokes, somebody write this boy a show, this is the third time I've seen Stokes and the he gets a brief scene as the best man at that first wedding that properly utilizes him. The show that took the best advantage of him was *Nimbus Theatre's A Count Up To Christmas*. This guy has a niche, he couldn't pull off *The Guy* in *Once* or Robbie in *The Wedding Singer*,

he has a different skill set, which is unique and needs to be utilized. I couldn't even tell you what role he should be cast in, but he's got something and I have a feeling nobodies quite sure what it is yet. I repeat, somebody needs to write a show for this guy, I would be first in line.

Director Jake Sung-Guk Sullivan and Choreographer Michael Terrell Brown fill the stage with energy and creativity. The staging of a scene in a revolving restaurant is really well done. The dance moves throughout are really well synchronized and full of energy. Wesley Frye is the Music Director and the band is Burning Sensation who perfectly capture the sound of the 1980's. Justin Hooper Set Design is versatile, transforming with little effort into various locations, the bed in Grandma Rosie's basement is particularly inventive. The costumes by Emma Kravig are a hoot! Wait until you get a look at Robbie's outfit to go clubbing in. This is a production that really just comes together beautifully from a truly cohesive ensemble cast to the parachute pants.

*The Wedding Singer* runs through March 26th at Lyric Arts in Anoka for more information and to purchase tickets go to <https://www.lyricarts.org/the-wedding-singer> ([//www.lyricarts.org/the-wedding-singer](https://www.lyricarts.org/the-wedding-singer))

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I am also a member of the Twin Cities Theater Bloggers, you can read roundups of shows by my colleagues and I on facebook @TwinCitiesTheaterBloggers. Follow that group, It's a great way to see reviews for shows I don't get to or to get another bloggers take on one. We have some exciting things in the works for 2023 for the TCTB and our readers, follows us to be the first to know about those happenings. Such as our Prom Date with the TCTB that we held on March 4th. If you didn't make it to that event there's still time to see the The Prom at Chanhassen Dinner Theatres and you can use the discount code TCTB1 for \$20 off each ticket on performances through 3/12/23.

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