

Nice Work If You Can Get It - A Retro Musical Feast That Proves to Be Absolutely "Delicious"

BY MELANIE BAKER



Kaye and McGrath in a scene from *Nice Work If You Can Get It*

At Broadway's Imperial Theatre, intermission is undoubtedly the worst part of the evening: the halfway point during which besotted theatregoers wait with bated breath for stars Matthew Broderick and Kelli O'Hara to return to the stage.

As a not-all-that-street-smart playboy, Broderick is at the top of his song-and-dance game even if his character, Jimmy Winter, is suffering the consequences of "wrong place, wrong time" syndrome. And he is well-matched by silver-voiced O'Hara's tomboy bootlegger Billie Bendix, who stays fast by Jimmy's side as the two tumble haphazardly into love, law-bending, and any number of madcap ploys to turn Long Island's aristocratic key holders on their metaphorical heads.

But *Nice Work If You Can Get It's* arsenal of star power doesn't stop delivering the goods—or cases of bathtub gin, as the plot dictates—with its headliners. The show's main comic foils, gangster Cookie McGee and Duchess Estonia Dulworth, are played by Michael McGrath and Judy Kaye—a couple of savvy Broadway vets who manage to steal scenes like bandits to the delight of the audience—and 2012 Tony voters, who made sure the duo took home the Best Featured Actor and Best Featured Actress in a Musical awards for their performances.

Kaye, whose Broadway credits include *Phantom of the Opera* (her first Tony

Award), *Ragtime*, and *Mamma Mia!*, is a paragon of musical comedy versatility as Dulworth, a staunch Prohibitionist on the warpath to save the world from the horrific effects of "Demon Rum"—which just happens to be one of several Gershwin tunes she sings during the show.

"[Comedy] is in my wheelhouse and one of the things I enjoy most; I've been doing it for 40 some odd years," says Kaye, adding, "We have a saying in my family, 'AFAL – Anything for a laugh.' In the context of [*Nice Work*], it's a wonderful experience having people like Michael McGrath to play off of."

And indeed it is McGrath's McGee who, in the guise of an increasingly crazed butler, launches Kaye to her comic acme by way of an Act II dinner party during which he spikes Dulworth's glass of lemonade with booze. This leads to the fanatic teetotaler's plunge from sober grace to drunken hilarity, culminating with a chandelier

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"moment" so outrageous and seamlessly conveyed that it brings down the house... and Kaye!

And even though the show has been playing the Imperial since March, breaking out of Dulworth's reserved shell and into the boisterous center of attention continues to be an exciting challenge for Kaye.

"[Dulworth] does have a rather hard and enjoyable story arc. She has a fairly quick turnaround but I feel she's been waiting to break out," says Kaye, observing that the show in general "has a rhythm like something straight out of a Marx Brothers movie; it's really fun to play."

This full-bodied musical—teeming with sassy 1920s chorines, good guys and bad guys, Estelle Parsons (last scene; swell beyond words), lusty dance numbers (directed and choreographed by Tony

winner Kathleen Marshall, who directed/choreographed last season's *Anything Goes* as well as the Roundabout hit *The Pajama Game*, also with O'Hara)—features a no-holds-barred book by Joe DiPietro and has been attracting audiences of every generation to the Imperial.

Kaye herself has noticed Gershwin fans from way back are flocking to the theatre alongside the newest wave of young Broadway lovers.

"The songs of George and Ira Gershwin have truly stood the test of time," concludes Kaye. "It's an amazing script. Kathleen Marshall nurtured us to create these characters, and encouraged us to have fun with the comedy. She has a wonderful sense of comedy herself. You have to have a commitment to leap on all fours." (Don't ask; just be assured "S Wonderful.")

Nice Work If You Can Get It is playing at the Imperial Theatre, 249 W. 45th St. For tickets, call 212-239-6200 or visit niceworkonbroadway.com.



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