

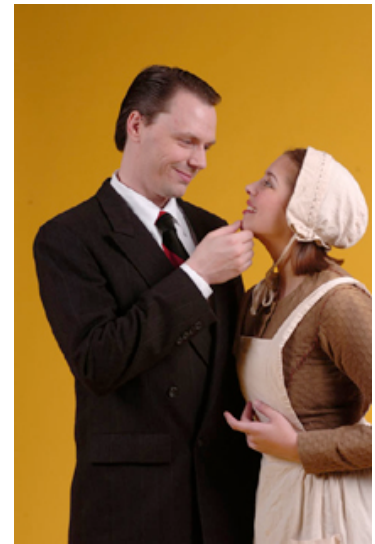
Theatre

Plain and Fancy: Sweet and Saucy!

By Linda Ayres-Frederick

Published: March 22, 2007

42nd Street Moon, the production company known for unearthing and breathing life back into uncommon and rarely produced musicals has done it again with *Plain and Fancy*. Imaginatively directed in a staged concert format by Bobby Weinapple (42nd St.'s *Pardon My English*, Free Range's *A Perfect Ganesh*, Theatre Q's *Things You Shouldn't Say Past Midnight*), *Plain and Fancy* was the 1955 musical that gave Barbara Cook her first major Broadway opportunity. She later reprised the role in the SF Civic Light Opera production, with Craig Stevens and Alexis Smith in '57.



New Yorker Dan King (Bill Olson) charms Amish girl Hilda Miller (Brandy Collazo). Photo by David Allen.

Just produced at New York's Musicals in Mufti two weeks ago, P & F got rave reviews with the general drift being, "Why isn't this show produced more often?" P & F follows the cultural collision that occurs when two cosmopolitan New Yorkers find themselves lost in Pennsylvania Amish country. Fancy city slicker Dan King (a well-manicured, dashing Bill Olson) has inherited a farm from his paternal Amish grandfather—who went by Konig instead of the anglicized King—and has come to see the property before selling it to one of the neighbors. His other choice is to sell it at a higher price to a manufacturer to build a factory, but he's too nice a guy — this is the 50's and heroes had to be nice guys — to do something so ecologically and sociologically unfriendly. Along for the ride is tell-it-like-it-is girlfriend Ruth Winters (with spot-on comic timing Amy Louise Cole).

Arriving just in time for a traditionally arranged Amish wedding where Dad picks the groom, Ruth and Dan meet the well-behaved bride Katie (the lovely Alexandra Kaprielian), her unyielding, bearded Papa Yoder (the believably stern Mark Cornelius), the easily misled chosen spouse-to-be Ezra Reber (a convincing Tony Panaghetto), Ezra's hapless brother Peter (Darrin Glesser) who had always thought he'd be Katie's bride as she had also hoped, and Hilda Miller (an endearing Brandy Collazo in the Barbara Cook role) the young Amish woman with an eager curiosity about the outside world. **Also notable in the cast are Hilda's mother Emma (a delightful Lua Hadar)** and the rest of the solidly committed ensemble (Buzz Halsing, Vince Faso, Chris Macomber, Dan Bernstein, Tom Orr, Kathleen Dederian and Samantha Bartholomew).

With fine musical direction by Dave Dobrusky and making-the-most-of-the-space choreography by Staci Arriaga, the musical includes the major hit "Young and Foolish" which reprises through the show and gets better each time. With well-blended voices throughout, **the contrast in cultures is delightfully exemplified in "City Mouse, Country Mouse."** At the helm of the comic relief, Ms. Cole's Ruth punctuates the show with one-liners that bring the house down, and is equally effective in her solo "It's a Helluva Way to Run a Love Affair." Ezra's "Why Not Katie?" makes mincemeat out of all the romance of picking a mate and is hilarious. The most heart-rending scene takes place when the wrongly accused Peter gets shunned by the community. By the end of the play, the audience is relieved when Peter is redeemed, Katie shows her starch by standing up to her father and the two former sweethearts get the blessing from a now-wiser Amish parent.

A two-hanky for sure, that will bring a smile to your heart, *Plain and Fancy* is a seamlessly directed, sweet and saucy musical show that deserves to be seen. Highly recommended.

Plain and Fancy continues through April 1 at the Eureka Theatre, 215 Jackson St., SF. Tickets (\$20 to \$38) phone (415) 255-8207 or go to www.42ndstmoon.org.