

PRESS HISTORY

Anatomy Of A Dancer

Tribute To The Life Of A Song And Dance Man

Press From Toronto Fringe Festival 2018

Now Magazine NNN

Fringe review: Anatomy Of A Dancer

Homage to song and dance man Gene Kelly doesn't shed light on what made Kelly great, but the cast decently recreates some classic numbers.

By Kathleen Smith July 6th 2018

Fans of Hollywood musicals such as *An American in Paris* will likely love this overly sincere homage to ultimate song and dance man Gene Kelly.

Singer/actors **Robbie Fenton** and **Maddison Hayes-Crook** introduce a series of numbers that loosely follow Kelly's career path from his early days at the family dance studio in Pittsburgh to his glory days on the silver screen during the 40s and 50s.

Although the production doesn't shed much light on exactly what made Kelly so great, the cast does a pretty good technical job re-interpreting numbers from classics like *Singin' In The Rain* and *I Got Rhythm*, as well as other iconic numbers from the era like *Cheek To Cheek* from *Top Hat* (which starred Kelly's rival Fred Astaire) and Charlie Chaplin's *Smile*.

On opening night, staging issues sent performers dancing behind the wings, and there were a few wobbly dance lifts and poses. But the action is smartly constructed; the ensemble numbers genuinely rousing, and the Kelly canon is nothing if not toe-tapping.

My Entertainment World (A-)

By Duncan Derry July 11th 2018

Breakaway Entertainment are putting on an exuberant song and dance show about the life of Gene Kelly, careening through eleven pieces in under an hour that show off its talented troupe of young dancers. Robbie Fenton and Maddison Hayes-Crook, costumed by Kate Knox like the rest of the cast in mid-century American dress, frame the show as our narrators, taking us through the highlights of Kelly's career as the rest of the cast dances out corresponding scenarios. Highlights include a high-octane ensemble piece set to Benny Goodman's ever-reliable "Sing, Sing, Sing", and a gorgeous pas de deux danced by Micah Enzlin and Alayna Kellet and set to Irving Berlin's "Cheek to Cheek". Another standout was Charlie Chaplin's

“Smile”, danced wonderfully by Stéphanie Visconti in an evocation of Judy Garland’s life. But, aside from a few early pieces that ended rather abruptly and didn’t seem quite as well aligned with the chosen music as they could have been, almost every piece is strong, and the show seems to increase in energy and *chutzpah* as it goes on, climaxing with an ecstatic and endless finale set to George Gershwin’s “I’ve Got Rhythm”. Director and choreographer Adam Martino keeps the thematic focus nicely on Kelly without overindulging the expected stuff (“Singing in the Rain” is only a part of a larger medley), and he and co-choreographer Leah Cameron keep the onstage movement fluid and electric, even when the space is packed with every performer. Fenton and Hayes-Crook both do a good job crooning some classics, and they get in on the dancing as well. The rest of the cast, which includes Ashley Harju, Jacqueline Dos Santos, Matthew Eldracher, Rohan Dhupar and Sam Black, are stellar. Extra points for everyone bowing within the final dance, and then firmly exiting the stage for good when the audience was at its most enthused.

Mooney On Theatre

By Catherine Jan July 6th 2018

Playing at the Al Green Theatre at the 2018 Toronto Fringe Festival, Anatomy of Dancer is a stunning tribute to Gene Kelly. The eight dancers of Breakaway Entertainment sweep us off our feet as they present Kelly’s journey to stardom with stops in Philadelphia, New York and Hollywood.

The choreography by Adam Martino is snappy and sharp, and the variety of moves showcase the dancers’ talent. Thanks to Ashley Harju, Alayna Kellet, Jaqueline Dos Santos, Matthew Eldracher, Micah Enzlin, Rohan Dhupar, Sam Black, and Stéphanie Visconti, we see backflips, cartwheels, pirouettes and, from time to time, a woman is effortlessly thrown up in the air. I loved the romantic, wistful dancing to “Cheek to Cheek” around the restaurant table, as well as the slick and energetic tap-dancing to “Mr. Bojangles” that ended with Fred Astaire symbolically passing his hat to Kelly.

Even though few words are used in Anatomy of Dancer, the story-telling is powerful. We see Gene Kelly’s loneliness in New York, his apprehension about dancing with Judy Garland, and his funny bone that’s expressed in “Make Them Laugh.” This scene by the way includes a banana, and I haven’t seen a banana on stage for years.

My only regret is that I was expecting more of “Singin’ in the Rain.” There was indeed a short, well-executed dance to this famous tune that involved an umbrella and puddle-jumping, but it must have been an abbreviated version that lasted only a couple of minutes.

My friends have asked me for Fringe recommendations and I will definitely encourage them to see Anatomy of a Dancer. It's clear that this team has put tons of love into this impressive production. You will be wowed.

My Gay Toronto

Monday, 9 July 2018

Fringe Review: Anatomy of a Dancer

Darren Stewart-Jones

I love anything to do with old Hollywood, especially MGM musicals. I feel fortunate to have seen *Gene Kelly: The Legacy* in Toronto last year. In that show, Kelly's widow, Patricia Ward Kelly, recounts wonderful anecdotes from her late husband's life and career interpolated with film footage from his movies.

Anatomy of a Dancer: The Life of a Song & Dance Man is a similar type of show. It's a tribute to Gene Kelly told through choreography. A cast of eight dancers and two narrators/vocalists take us on a journey through Kelly's life from his early days in Pittsburgh to his time on Broadway and finally to Hollywood, where he starred in the films *For Me And My Gal*, *An American In Paris* and *Singin' In The Rain* to name just a few.

The show has wonderful choreography by Adam Martino, assisted by Leah Cameron. The eight dancers perform said choreography beautifully, with each of the four male dancers, rather than just one, given the opportunity to play Kelly at different moments throughout the show. All four - Micah Enzlin, Matthew Eldracher, Sam Black and Rohan Dhupar - had a chance to shine and impress an enthusiastic, responsive audience.

Robbie Fenton's vocals and Stephanie Visconti's dancing in her portrayal of Judy Garland were definite highlights for me. My only criticism is that I wish the screen at the back of the stage had been used to display more visuals or colours. Otherwise, *Anatomy of a Dancer* makes for a very entertaining show. And I've heard rumours that Patricia Ward Kelly herself might grace the production with her presence during its Toronto Fringe run.

The Dance Current

Sensational but Stuck

Breakaway Entertainment's Anatomy of a Dancer at the Toronto Fringe Festival

By Grace Wells-Smith

July 5-15, 2018, Al Green Theatre, Toronto

Befitting a show dedicated to Gene Kelly, I walked in the pouring rain to the Al Green Theatre in Toronto to see *Anatomy of a Dancer* by Breakaway Entertainment and choreographed by Adam Martino. Usually, a thunderstorm would be a wet enough blanket to stop audience members from attending a show, let alone a 10:30pm start time, but the opening night was nicely attended. Maybe I wasn't the only one who thought it romantic.

The dancers are the reason to sit soaking wet in an air-conditioned theatre. Ashley Harju, Alayna Kellett, Jacqueline Dos Santos, Matthew Eldracher, Micah Enzlin, Rohan Dhupar, Sam Black and Stéphanie Visconti are technical, stylish dancers and vivacious performers. Their energy was unwavering throughout the high-cardio, fifty-five-minute show, during which we were treated to big jumps, impressive turns and even a few backflips.

We saw all the favourite classic steps: the Charleston, *Singin' in the Rain* tap and a sweet duet ending with a hat-hidden kiss and a popped, high-heeled foot. Although the choreography was at times repetitive (except for an all-too-short duet involving a kazoo), Martino's talent and passion for Broadway jazz is clear.

But I question: is it possible to make a feminist mid-twentieth-century show?

The story, with narration by singers Madison Hayes-Crook and Robbie Fenton, follows the career of Kelly and features the four male dancers exquisitely, but for me it felt like the female dancers were still accessories. The humour is given to the men; the big finishes are given to the men; and the women are there to emphasize the men's success.

I've had this conversation many times, and the excuses "The story is about a man" and "But that's how it was back then" always come up. I think the creativity in telling old stories lies in how we tell them. Sure, the story is about a man and that's how it was back then, but can we pay tribute to the past in the context of now? Harju, Kellett, Dos Santos and Visconti's powerful virtuosity appears limitless. When you have eight of some of the strongest jazz dancers in one studio, it seems like the possibility of unleashing each dancer's potential is up for grabs.

When I ask myself why Kelly is important, my answer is that he played a part in making dance accessible to film audiences. Usually, we don't pay tribute to choreographers who didn't change the industry in some way, so what would it look like if we honoured these changemakers by continuing to move the industry

forward? A powerful big finish from a woman, that doesn't include posing with a man, may be a good first step.