

THE LAST FIVE YEARS

Written and composed by John Robert Brown

Virginia Stage Company

Feb.25-Mar.13 2010

For tickets (757) 1234 or Ticketmaster 800 (982-2787)

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

If you are hungry for a musical that has real melodies and more than passing witty, literate lyrics this little gem of show must be seen. It's not without humor, it warms the heart and then turns around and breaks it. It's a shattered Valentine.

As written and composed by John Robert Brown, the action place in 14 song/scenes. They tell the story of the five year love and marriage of Cathy Hiatt (played by Summer Broyhill) and Jamie Wellerstein (Colin Israel). It doesn't last. Brown's conceit is that he has chosen to tell the romantic comedy drama in two directions. She sings "Still Hurting" at the beginning as she laments their lost love. There is virtually no dialogue. He goes right into "Shiksa Goddess" in his elation of newly discovered love. They solve the religious issue by putting a star of David atop the Christmas tree.

This device of telling the story in reverse is by and large most inventive and gives the piece a new approach to the memory play. To compare then and now simultaneously is intriguing and consistently holds our interest.

Patrick Mullins has given the evening a brisk, sophisticated rendering. One might argue that it's a little too fast paced on occasion. You want to allow the two charismatic actors a few moments of emotional breath and variation. As is, there is a slight dynamic sameness to the scenes. This is a minor quibble, however, and it's a relief that one doesn't have to sit there saying "get on with it."

The two meet in college. At this point we get into the musical score that incorporates classical, jazz, pop, Latin and a minimum of rock styles. They are attracted to each other instantly. "She'Smling" and he wonders if things are moving too fast. Think Cole Porter's "Is This Love Affair Not Too Hot Not to Cool Down?" Even so, they are off to New York. He shares her apartment. Marriage follows. He pursues his career as a novelist at Columbia and she studies acting. His talent is obviously more pronounced than hers. In one of the high points of the evening we see her audition, audition and audition without success. However, there is very important interest in his novel, his career takes off. and he is ultimately published.

The dissolution of the relationship is now in full swing as the eternal struggle of career and personal values takes over.

Summer Broyhill has many lovely moments. She is at her best in the night-clubby songs. Her big belting numbers seem forced and less believable.

Colin Israel is clear in every acting intention and vocally pure and crisp with just the right sound for the emerging writer.

The sextet of musicians are musically and visually fine as conducted by Barton Kuebler. Terry Summers Flint, Scenic Designer, Traci Klainer Polimeni, Lighting and Kelly Kasper, Costumes lend an appropriate authenticity to the New York montage set.

THE LAST FIVE YEARS functions on multiple levels. Many of them may remind you of you.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.