

Thursday, July 16, 2009

[Review- Barefoot In The Park \(Ground Up Productions\)](#)

The Fab Marquee review by *David Stallings*.

The early sixties are remembered fondly for innocent sex comedies that toyed with the changing roles of men and women and how they interacted as societal values shifted. At the top of the list sits Neil Simon's *Barefoot in the Park* (the longest running of his numerous hit plays). The play is definitely a period piece by today's standards but nevertheless still entertains a modern audience. Ground Up's current production at Manhattan Theatre Source (not coincidentally steps away from Washington Square Park) is appropriately charming and hits every mark. Director Lon Bumgarner was faithful to the period in manner, rhythm, and atmosphere—bringing the intimate space to life through the crisp performances of his adept actors.



Kate Middleton & Guy Olivieri | photo credit: Randy Morrison

The play follows a newlywed couple, Paul (Guy Olivieri) and Corie (Kate Middleton), as they move into their first apartment in the West Village. The fact that it is a fifth-floor walk-up with no bathtub does not phase Corie in the least. She bounces back from every obstacle with flare and optimism. Of course the fact that she does not have a job is never brought up in this play. Corie happily designs the room and calms her stoic husband as he enters from long days at the office. The building is littered with eccentrics, including Victor Velasco (Eric Purcell) who has to enter through their apartment to get to his. Mr. Velasco has fallen behind on rent and uses an outdoor ledge to break into his own flat. But what truly gets to the beleaguered Paul is that

the skylight is broken in the middle of winter, the apartment is freezing, and still his wife dreams of walking barefoot in the park.

The plot involves Corie setting her dear sweet widowed mother, Mrs. Banks (Amelia White), up with Mr. Velasco. Velasco must learn how to embrace his matured age just as Mrs. Banks must admit that she is not too old for a love affair. Corie and Paul must learn to compromise—each giving up a part of themselves to make room for the relationship.



Kate Middleton, Amelia White & Eric Purcell | photo credit: Randy Morrison

This production's performances are excellent. Middleton plays Corie to the hilt—maintaining strength of character in a part often confused for flighty or insipid. Olivieri perfectly captures the style of the era with Paul without judgement. Embracing the sweetness of the role, Mr. Olivieri never seems like a misogynist—not easy to avoid in this period. Amelia White steals every scene as the widowed Mrs. Banks. One truly believes she stepped out of sixties New Jersey and onto the stage. Her sudden acceptance of lost youth garners mid-scene applause from the audience. One cannot forget Eric Purcell's performance of the wild Mr. Velasco. Truly, the ensemble listens and reacts beautifully without ever forgetting their period context.

Having seen several plays at Manhattan Theatre Source, I was shocked from the moment I entered and felt I was in a different space. Travis McHale incredibly renovated the stage and created a believable period NYC apartment, complete with a skylight. McHale's lights were equally impressive, capturing the mood of an NYC afternoon. Stacey Berman's costumes were fantastic—more than perfectly period—they captured the essence of each character.

I highly recommend filling an afternoon or evening with Ground Up's production of *Barefoot in the Park*—the perfect summer treat—light, crisp, and humorous.

GroundUpProductions

presents

NeilSimon's

BarefootInThePark

July 8-25, 2009 (Wed-Fri @ 8pm; Sat @ 2pm-8pm; Sun @ 2pm)

Manhattan Theatre Source