



# An Online Entertainment Magazine

## A Hilarious Grave

- Main
- Theater
- Dance
- Opera
- Cinema
- Books
- Music
- Features
- Stages
- Letters
- New York
- Regional
- Masthead
- Advertise
- Disclaimer



By Rob Stevens

If you are a fan of musical theater and really enjoy wicked parody, you're in for a real treat with *The Grave White Way* at the Hudson Backstage Theatre in Hollywood. Joe Patrick Ward has sublimely combined parody and musical theater in his book, music, and lyrics for this outrageously funny revue. The opening night audience was doubling over in laughter from the sharp wit of Ward and the wacky and inspired performances by the stellar cast.

Five performers find themselves dead but not in the heaven of Berlin and Gershwin, Merman and Martin. Rather they are stuck on "The Grave White Way" because their talents (and the shows they performed in) just didn't make the grade. They are given one last chance by the powers to be to "audition" their way into the better heaven. The five throw themselves into their renditions of songs from the flops that got them where they are. It's hilarious fun as Ward fashions paeans to everything from *Showboat* to *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Then there's the Helen Keller musical *Oh, Helen!*, the Lizzie Borden tuner *40 Whacks 40!*, the musical story of Father Damien *Look Before*

*you Leper* and a host of other just as inspired and twisted scenarios. Sondheim gets his with *Winter in the Woods with Donner* and the love ballad "Eat Me" while Shonberg/Boublil get theirs with "My Heart is in My Chest" from *Lady Hiroshima*.

Craig A. Curtis, Joshua Finkel, Lesli Margherita, Amy Rutberg and Shannon Stoeke all get a chance to shine in this musical foolishness, displaying great voices as well as precise comic timing. Curtis makes a droll Oscar Wilde in "Chummy Chum Chum" while Finkel dances with a broom in "He's Clean and She's Not." Stoeke leads the cast through "Wow," the right-on parody of *A Chorus Line*. Rutberg's ingenue sweetness works wonders with "The Mice, the Men, the Music and Me" while Margherita perfectly plays the scenery chewing prima donna in "My Parents Like Him So."

Sarah Gurfield's assured and full power direction keeps the merriment coming at a fast clip. Kay Cole's choreography matches the perfect steps to this madcap entertainment. There is also a special guest star every night to plead the quintet's case by performing a song from one of their "flops." On opening night, it was musical theater legend John Raitt delivering a perfectly deadpan rendition of Ward's "Darlin' Sally from Death Valley." This is one show you can't miss. Who needs *Forbidden Broadway* when Ward has created such a delirious parallel Broadway populated with the greatest flops and funniest parodies of all time.

*The Grave White Way*, produced by Jayson Raitt, Michael WEiner and Alan Zachary at the Hudson Backstage Theatre, 6537 Santa Monica Blvd. in Hollywood. (310) 289-2999. \$27.50-30. Thur-Sat, 9, Sun, 7. Closes June 17.