

## THEATRE REVIEW

# *The Producers* at The Saenger Theatre

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NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

Anyone who saw Mel Brooks' *The Producers* recently at the Saenger should feel that they got their money's worth. Having seen *The Producers* on Broadway, albeit without Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick, I can assure you that our *Producers* was as good if not better than the Great White Way's.



Patrick Boyd, as Leo Bloom, and a bevy of lovely showgirls perform "I Wanna Be A Producer" at The Saenger (Photo: M.T. Holmes)

Unquestionably, the production values were equal. As for the cast, I actually preferred this one. Unlike Brad Oscar, Broadway's current Max Bialystock, you actually believed that Lewis J. Stadlen is from the Bronx. While just as blonde and long-legged as NYC's Ulla, Charley Izabella King conveyed a more tangible warmth towards Alan Ruck, her Leo Bloom, who made this role more idiosyncratic than Steven Weber had. And there was a certifiable bond between Lee Roy Reams and Josh Prince, our Roger DeBris and his Carmen Ghia, that had been missing up North; these two clearly had been a couple for at least a couple of years.

With such scenes as the surreally funny first act finale *Little Old Lady Land*, Max's Act Two recapitulation of the show and the completely over the top production number *Springtime for Hitler*, as I wrote in December 2002, "*The Producers* is guaranteed to make your smile muscles hurt." Yet seeing the show again, I found it frustrating that there are no truly memorable songs in Brooks' pastiche of a score nor was I genuinely moved, both of which seem to be a trend for Broadway musicals these days (e.g., *Hairspray*, *Wicked*).

But something interesting occurred later in *The Producers*' run at the Saenger. Alan Ruck was out sick and his understudy Patrick Boyd went on in his place. Smaller in stature than Ruck and not having his patina of fame, Boyd made a much more plausible Leo; for once, you believed it when Max called this timid accountant "mousey." Endowed with copious singing, dancing and acting talent, seeing Boyd bloom on stage and ultimately win over the audience who had come expecting to see a "star" was more heartwarming than the play proper.

Maybe that's what the producers should do; bill someone like Tom Cruise or Brad Pitt as playing Leo and then have the understudy, or perhaps rotating understudies to keep it really fresh, go on each night. Hmm, I'm sure the lawyers would have a field day with that one.

In the meantime, Patrick Boyd shall hopefully soon attain stardom himself causing the *Producers*' producers to install him in the lead role, perhaps on Broadway. But by then he might not be quite so right a Leo anymore.



Patrick Boyd blossomed as Leo Bloom in *The Producers*.