

BWW Review: Pasadena Playhouse Brings Back Live Radio Play IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

by Don Grigware Dec. 15, 2018



*It's a Wonderful Life /A Live Radio Play/*from the screenplay by **Frances Goodrich, Albert Hackett, Frank Capra, Jo Swerling**/adapted by **Joe Landry**/directed by **Cameron Watson**/**Pasadena Playhouse**/through December 23 only

Babyboomers are familiar with the original 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life* starring **James Stewart**, **Donna Reed** and **Lionel Barrymore**. Stewart played **George**

Bailey who was trapped in his father's Savings and Loan establishment in Bedford Falls, unable to pursue his dreams. Now through December 23 only, **The Pasadena Playhouse** is presenting a radio play version live onstage adapted by **Joe Landry** from the 1946 screenplay.

The cast is wonderful and is the main reason to see the show. The phenomenally talented group includes **Rob Nagle** as Freddie Filmore, host of radio station WBFR in Manhattan, and playing a myriad of roles within the story including Uncle Billy Bailey and notorious Mr. Potter. **Simon Helberg** is actor Jake Laurents playing **George Bailey**; **Rebecca Mozo** is actress Sally Applewhite who plays Mary; **Ryun Yu** is Harry Heywood playing roles including Clarence, George's guardian angel on a mission to earn his wings; **Haneefah Wood** is Lana who plays many roles including the loose Violet and ZuZu, George's little girl ... and last but hardly least **Jeff Gardner** is the foley artist. They give it their all, and the comedy really shines under Cameron Watson's nicely paced direction. I do not believe Helberg is perfectly cast as George physically or charismatically, but I had to remind myself that I would not see him, only hear his voice.

The plot of *It's a Wonderful Life* is akin to that of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* showing what a valuable contribution we make to life when we embrace it and involve ourselves fully in the lives of family, friends and others in our surrounding community. Comic Clarence, who fumbles guiding George to appreciate himself and what he has, represents **Jacob Marley** and the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future all rolled into one. A heavy dose of Christianity and spirituality pervade both stories, and we feel uplifted by the happy, happy outcome.

Two delightful additions to the radio play are music - the actors actually sing carols...and the live radio commercials. There's one for a hair cream similar to Brylcreem and another for cake soap, of the Lava variety.

Costumes by **Kate Bergh** and sound by **Jeff Gardner** add greatly to embellish the piece. The set, uncredited, is I believe the same studio set used last year for *Miracle on 34th Street*/A Live Radio Play. When it opens up to show the lighted sky by night and brightly lit Christmas trees along the dark streets of Bedford Falls, the darker aspect of the play where George does not exist really comes alive. There is so much to enjoy watching the radio play live, that I guarantee an entertaining evening for kids of all ages. Gardner creating all the sound effects as the foley artist is alone worth the price of admission.

