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Shine: A Burlesque Musical delivers copious amounts of pleasure

Shine: A Burlesque Musical totters a bit in its platform heels, but what the hell—that just makes its pasties swing more freely. In other words, this show isn't the slickest ever mounted, but it is a huge amount of fun. Everybody on-stage is having a fantastic time and that joy flows, barrier-free, into the audience. There's deep humanity in the material's progressive, playful politics. And the whole thing is so damn sex-positive it makes you want to make out with everybody you've ever been friendly with.

The story is simple enough. Hard-bitten, heart-of-gold Shine (Cass King) is about to lose the Aristocrat, the theatre she inherited from her grandfather. The outré burlesque acts Shine's been featuring aren't drawing big crowds. Producer Richard Suit (Michael Smith) reminds her of this when he offers to revamp the entertainment and save the day. "Remember this," he sings, "The next time you book an act / Who swallows his own piss." But Dick wants to push Shine too far into the oppressive mainstream. When he decides that Shine's headliner, Lulu Von Doozy (Noelle Pion), is too fat, Shine retorts, "How fat is she? So fat she looks like a normal woman? So fat she looks like she eats?" A stellar example of the new burlesque, SHINE is an empowered celebration of individuality.

This musical doesn't lecture, though. Instead, it happily embraces queerness, three-ways, raunchiness, and kink. Check out these lyrics from Mark Growden's "The Nasty": "I miss spreading your cheeks / and licking your bum / I miss kissing your lips / when they're soaked in my come." The Wet Spots—John Woods and King—wrote all of the other songs, and many are tremendous. In "Day Job", a blues number, restaurant workers shake cutlery bins to punctuate the beat. In the crisply staged "Perversions of Yesteryear", a nostalgic Shine sings about the pre-Internet days of sin as actors stage tableaux vivants of filthy postcards. "Everybody Wants to Be a Star" is an anthem worthy of Broadway.

In terms of performance, King holds the evening together. The woman has charisma and timing to burn. Playing a student who's writing a paper on the subversion of dominant gender roles, Gemma Isaac is also particularly polished. Timing is often wonky elsewhere, though—both actors and technicians could be more confident with their cues. The opening number, which cuts back and forth—shakily—between dialogue and music, gets the evening off to a weak start.

Still, SHINE delivers copious amounts of pleasure. Sit back and take it.

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