

# Theatre Arlington presents GYPSY

Theater Review – By Doug Sturdivant

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# GYPSY

*A Musical Fable* 

Book by **Arthur Laurents**      Music by **Jule Styne**      Lyrics by **Stephen Sondheim**

Suggested by the memoirs of  
**Gypsy Rose Lee**

My thoughts on **GYPSY** or...Everything's coming up bright lights, lollipops, and Brandy!

There is something so magical about the score of **Gypsy**. Just try to keep your foot still as Music Director Vonda K. Bowling and her dynamite band fill the auditorium with all those familiar tunes. That overture sets the stage for great expectations, and I am happy to report that in the Theatre Arlington production of the musical those expectations are met and exceeded. Curtain up!

Director Steven D. Norris has mined the book of **Gypsy** and struck gold by casting four of the strongest leads I've seen in a musical. Tilda Grace, Brian Hathaway, Presley Duyck, and Brandy Raper not only sing and move wonderfully, but ACT the roses, sunshine, and lollipops out of this musical. These four bring a depth to **Gypsy** that make the classic musical a compelling character study as well.

This was my first time seeing Tilda Grace on stage, but I had been told that she was a force. That turned out to be an understatement. Grace's skills as a singer/dancer are only exceeded by her skills as an actor. Grace's June is a young woman trapped in a child's role and life and her frustration is apparent especially in the scene before her dazzling duet of "If Momma Was Married" with Louise. Grace made me wish that book writer Arthur Laurents had brought June back in Act II.

When Brian Hathaway first appears as Herbie, Rose's love interest, you know a pro has hit the stage. Hathaway's face is so expressive it's as if one could read his thoughts. Herbie's attraction to Rose is almost immediate and he is the "good guy" that she so desperately needs in her life. Herbie's journey with Rose is not an easy one and Hathaway's Herbie quickly wins our admiration as he indulges all of Rose's eccentricities. He tries to desperately to make the relationship work and gains our sympathy when it does not.

How does Presley Duyck make herself look 12 years old so convincingly? The pigtails help, but that is just part of the transformation. This young woman is such an accomplished actor that just a change of stance or a shrug of the shoulders makes her read years younger on stage. And that's just her first transformation. Right before our eyes Duyck's awkward Louise slowly gains confidence and becomes the assured and

glamorous Gypsy Rose Lee. Duyck has the voice, the poise and the presence. Her Gypsy gives us “a real good time” indeed.

“All we need is someone with nerve!” And that would be the glorious Mama Rose, Brandy Raper. Petite in size, but power personified in singing and acting, Raper makes the most famous stage mother of all her own. Raper captures all of Rose’s stop at nothing drive as she pushes her daughters toward the show biz success that she covets for herself. Rose has an endless supply of dreams that she seems to come up with on the spot. There is a wonderful moment in the show when Raper sings “Everything’s Coming Up Roses” and Director Morris has Herbie and Louise stand off to the side and look on incredulously giving so much insight into how Rose’s overpowering personality “consumes” those around her. Raper brings it all home in her eleven o’clock number “Rose’s Turn.” It is a master class in how to act a song.

You gotta teach a stripper to strip and Gypsy has three seasoned pros to spell it out for her. Mattie Lillian Davis is the stripper with class, Tessie Tura. Davis makes Tessie tough but lovable and I kept thinking what a terrific Audrey in **Little Shop of Horrors** Davis would be. Theatre Arlington vet Aly Badalamenti is the “switched on” Electra and brings her high voltage personality that literally lights up the stage. Samantha Padilla is hilarious as the no nonsense Mazeppa. She’s a woman who has “been around the block a few times” and knows exactly how to get the results she wants as she works the audience into a frenzy stripping while playing the horn. Padilla also has a very amusing appearance as the secretary Miss Cratchett. These three women make “You Gotta Get A Gimmick” into a show stopping highlight.

The show also gets excellent support from other cast and ensemble members. Tenley Heugatter and Nahiara Zoe Lopez are polished and adorable as Baby June and Baby Louise and all of those Newsboys, Farm boys, and Hollywood Blondes are equally good. Caleb De La Torre is a suave and smooth Tulsa and has all the right moves in “All I Need Now is the Girl.” Zachary Nueva as Angie, Tanner Mobley as Yonkers, Jalen Xavier as Farm Boy, Jude Laine Lewis as Agnes, Landry Beckley as L.A., Audrey Lee as Dolores, Ally Ramsey as Marjorie May, and Hannah Sligar as Thelma are all top-notch performers. Three fine character actors are also assets to the production. Gary Payne is a suitably grumpy and “Rose weary” Pop, Bradford Reilly is the “not so kid friendly” Uncle Jocko, and Andrew Nicolas has his arms and mouth full as Mr. Goldstone. All three men play other characters as well.

Bryan Stevenson’s set takes us across the USA on the **Gypsy** journey and his lighting keeps it all colorful and in focus. Karen Potter has quite a job as costume designer for this crew but does it splendidly and makes the adult Louise look especially stylish.

Of course, a musical is nothing without the music and songs and Music Director Vonda K Bowling not only has the band sounding awesome, but also has the voices of this large cast “pitch perfect.” Sondheim lyrics are in highly capable hands here.

This **Gypsy** also moves very well. Choreographer Nicole Jamie Carrano has all kinds of sensational stepping from fast paced big group numbers to lovely smaller dances for groups of three and smaller. The dance where the children transform into teens on the turntable garnered deservedly big applause from the audience.

Director Steven D Norris makes this **Gypsy** a cut above. The singing, dancing, and especially the acting here are so well done here that you will be very glad you let Theatre Arlington’s **Gypsy** entertain you.

Oh, I almost forgot a special shout out to the “other” scene stealing stars of the show, that precious pooch Ranger Bowling and the fine feathered Gonzo Raper!