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# The Way The 'Net Was Meant To Be



## entertainment

### 'Ducky' goes swimmingly -- mostly

REVIEW: A polished cast delivers clever tunes combined with kiddie classic tales in La Mirada.

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By ERIC MARCHESE  
The Orange County Register

For those unfamiliar with "Everything's Ducky," just imagine the themes of "Into the Woods" merged with a musical melange like "Little Shop of Horrors'."

Of course, most people aren't familiar with "Everything's Ducky." The musical debuted in St. Louis and Cincinnati this year, and made its Southern California premiere last weekend at the La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts courtesy of McCoy Rigby Entertainment, which brought the show lock, stock and barrel from its recent one-month engagement at the Cincinnati Playhouse.

The show's creators, Bill Russell, Jeffrey Hatcher and Henry Krieger -- Krieger and Hatcher wrote the Broadway hit "Dreamgirls" -- obviously didn't copy the Sondheim or the Ashman-Menken musicals; they simply took Hans Christian Andersen's fable "The Ugly Duckling," goosed it with tales of the Big Bad Wolf and other children's stories, added a new millennium sensibility, and voila.

Like "Little Shop," Krieger's tunes run the gamut from gospel to '50s rock to '90s pop, while Russell's better lyrics forge the most clever rhymes from the most obvious material (his worse ones are pretty prosaic). And while a couple of tunes sound inspired by "Little Shop," most of the lively score shows a gratifying degree of originality.

That material -- Russell and Hatcher's libretto -- is a mishmash of childhood stories: a smattering of "Cinderella," a dash of "The Three Little Pigs" and a generous helping of "The Ugly Duckling." The setting is a young girl's bedroom. In her dreams, her toy barnyard set comes to life to enact the tale.

Duckling Serena (Natalie Toro), the youngest of the brood, isn't especially beautiful, something her gum-chewing, dim-bulb elder sisters Mildred (Angela Pupello) and Millicent (J.B. Wing) lord over her. As in the Andersen classic, Serena eventually discovers she's not just a homely duck but, rather, a gorgeous swan. But that's only the beginning. Along the way, she has a romantic encounter with Prince Drake (Tony Capone) and forms an emotionally intense alliance with Wolf (John Herrera) that shocks many.

Years earlier, Drake's father ordered an end to carnivorous activity within the kingdom, forcing all carnivores to become vegetarians. They've complied, and peace has ruled the land. But, unbeknownst to most, Wolf has begun to succumb to his hunger for meat - and there's something about Serena that brings out the beast in him.

If, storywise, "Everything's Ducky" becomes an unintelligible mishmash from about the intermission on, it's a hoot in practically every other respect, and - word of caution to you parents - with its many sexy references and double entendres, it's not exactly suited for young children. The musical is a scattershot sociopolitical spoof, and director Gip Hoppe and his cast pick up on the libretto's many playful in-jokes and run with them.

There are duck references galore (Web site, "Swan Lake," a model's runway labeled "DUKNY") and tons of puns (funny talk of "specism" and an over-the-heads-of-most reference to '60s TV character actor Billy DeWolfe). Sheep swig Woolite out of the bottle, while the dialogue offers parodies of "Gone With the Wind" and "Casablanca." And at a recent performance, when Wolf told Serena, "Just call me 'W,'" there were snorts and chuckles throughout the audience, no doubt tying it in with presidential candidate Bush's middle initial.

The musical numbers need less boosterism from the company, which looks and sounds completely at ease with the material. The diminutive Toro is anything but unattractive, with a dynamite singing voice. Capone's Drake is a sincere good guy, nicely balancing the darker Herrera, who makes a smooth transition from good guy to heavy (and who, like Toro, has enviable pipes).

Tracey Conyer Lee opens the show as Mrs. Bovine, but doesn't unleash her powerful vocal skills or exhibit her canny comic timing and stage presence until playing Galinda, the fashion expert who

propels Serena to stardom. Mark Chmiel essays five comic characters, notably the sleek fashion maven Armand Dillo and the swishy TV director Giorgio Grouse. Alicia Irving, too, puts a distinctive stamp on the Amanda Wingfield-like Mrs. Mallard, eccentric Aunt Leda and the oh-so-British Queen. Pupello and Wing offer a variety of comical roles, as do Bobby Daye and Jonathan Brody.

The music is all of a piece, with expert direction by Shawn Gough, vocal arrangements (by David Chase), peppy orchestrations (Harold Wheeler) and pleasing choreography (Linda Goodrich). Robert Bissinger's imaginative set design starts out looking like the foot of a child's bed as viewed from the floor, and winds up doubling as many other settings; Bissinger deliberately uses life-size everyday objects as the show's props. Beaver Bauer's costume design is flashy and functional, and the life-sized horse, pig, goat and duck puppets - designed by Erminio Pinque - add an imaginative, creative touch to the fanciful ballroom scene.

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