

WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND
Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber
Broadway Across America
Feb. 13-Feb 16, 2008
For tickets call (757)671-8100

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

I think this show opened in 1996 at the Kennedy Center under the direction of Hal Prince. Its intended Broadway residence never came into being.

However, it was revived in 1998 in London and ran for two and one-half years! I have no idea what changes or revisions were done to the piece except it had a really big set. It was a hit. Other versions followed. Shows that are hits in London are not always smashes in New York and vice versa. As one watches this jumble of a would-be musical that goes in all directions like a whistle in the wind, one ponders how that can happen. .

It's based on a novel by Mary Haley Bell. The time is 1959 in a small town in Louisiana. Three young children find an escaped convict hiding out in their barn. He mumbles "Jesus Christ" and they take it as an introduction, not an oath. But, I'm ahead of myself. First we see the funeral of the mother of the kids conducted in the barn. It's a typical Webber anthem that we've heard before as is true of much of the music that follows.

Very quickly we get into all sorts of other genre of show music including a lot of those falsetto, whispered minor key numbers that Mr. W. loves. There is also gospel, blues, a "Grease" type of song, a children's number screeched ala "Annie". Local kids are brought in to help out on this one as was as was done in a production of "Joseph and His Technicolor etc." a few years ago. Nothing wrong with that. Helps sell tickets. There's even a song with a Sondheim edge to it. And rock and country western. Pick a tune, any tune.

Some of this music is exciting. Above all else is "Nature of the Beast" sung magnificently by dramatic dynamo Eric Kunze as Jesus with the less forceful but pleasant Whitney Basher. Mr. Kunze is treated shabbily by Director Kenwright and Choreographer Henry Metcalf. They allow him to do little but stand and sing. They fail to take advantage of his brilliance as a performer. But then that's the way the show is done. The direction by and large consists of people marching on, rather funereally usually, and there is precious little structured movement by Metcalf. The characters are one dimensional. The director creates static tableaux vivants.

I'm surprised that after all these years a unified dramatic work of theatre has not emerged from this at times highly intriguing material. Right now it keeps going down in so many dead end roads that one loses interest.

It's ironic that Andrew Lloyd Webber's favorite musical is said to be "South Pacific" which is considered a classic example of the Broadway- by- the- book musical structure that follows all the rules. Maybe it will someday inspire Mr. Webber to create another enchanted evening. He hasn't had one for some time.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.