



Theater & Dance

‘Ordinary Days’ is an extraordinarily charming musical of questing young New Yorkers



Erin Weaver (Deb) and Samuel Edgerly (Warren) in Round House Theatre's current production of 'Ordinary Days.' (Danisha Crosby)

BY **PETER MARKS** June 4 at 4:41 PM Follow @petermarksdrama

If life really were more like a musical, you'd be contented if that life percolated as vibrantly as does “Ordinary Days,” Adam Gwon’s sweet, fleet and tender survey of four youngish New Yorkers, fighting through the emotional noise and dramatic traffic to arrive at a clearer sense of who they are and what they want to be.

It’s a beguiling little tale, set to Gwon’s effervescent, urban-romantic melodies and performed here under Matthew Gardiner’s superlative direction by four smashing actors: Samuel Edgerly, Erin Weaver, Will Gartshore and Janine DiVita. Though modest in scale, the musical resides happily on Round House Theatre’s high, wide stage. The expansiveness contributes to the notion of four questing souls dwarfed as much by a daunting landscape as by the size of their hopes.

Accompanied by the fine pianist William Yanesh, who is seated onstage at a baby grand, the actors create a quartet of beautifully contoured portraits having to do with the stutter-step progress of making friends, coupling and discovering one’s calling. As each actor has a highlight moment or two in this 85-minute show, identifying a favorite is kind of

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silly. Still, it feels important to point out that Edgerly, playing a bighearted, underemployed artist's assistant named Warren, makes a particularly endearing impression — the sort that in a just world would guarantee him roles in musicals for a long time to come.

“Ordinary Days,” though, is crucially the sum of four parts, and Edgerly’s compadres have been cast and guided by Gardiner with acute theatrical antennae. Weaver, who has emerged courtesy of her work in Signature Theatre’s “Xanadu” and “Company” as one of the region’s most charismatic musical actors, demonstrates again in her portrayal of angst-ridden grad student Deb a singular gift for tortured ambivalence.

As he’s proven in the past, in musicals as divergent in style as “Urinetown” and “Assassins,” Gartshore bottles charm along with his chops, talents well applied to Jason, a nice guy who’s persuaded his somewhat reluctant girlfriend to let him move in. And portraying Claire, the woman in Jason’s life who can’t quite shed the sorrows of her past, DiVita wears a mask of edgy self-assurance with a splendid hint of the insecurity it conceals.

Gwon’s 19 songs are the evening’s sole engine. They’re lyrically witty and rich enough in narrative and character detail to power the dual plots of the musical. “Sort-of Fairy Tale” is the title of one of the numbers, and it identifies a wistfulness that links the alternating stories. One tale revolves around strangers and the other, around lovers. In the former, a connection is made after Warren finds Deb’s misplaced treasure, the book containing all of the notes for her dissertation on Virginia Woolf, and arranges to give it back to her. In the latter, cohabiting Jason and Claire learn that building a city nest requires more compromise and patience than they bargained for.

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The two stories converge only tangentially, in that random way people in a large metropolis might brush past each other, once or maybe as many as 100 times, in a Starbucks, a park, or a museum. “Saturday at the Met” depicts all four characters wandering in the cavernous Metropolitan Museum of Art, where hilariously anxious Deb can’t find Warren or the Monet at which the exchange of the book is supposed to occur.

Incidentally, the Warren-and-Deb plot is about friendship, not romance. It’s one of the refreshing dichotomies constructed by Gwon, who can invest a platonic story with as much meaning as one about passion.

It’s the kind of unadorned musical — produced off-Broadway in 2009, by Roundabout Theatre Company — that feels like such a fresh alternative to most of the over-produced stuff on Broadway. And Round House proves itself here to be a natural spot for the work to live on.

Gardiner and set designer Misha Kachman allow the show to breathe on Round House’s main stage in Bethesda with an open-plan type of approach, the apartments and public spaces represented by a sofa or table. The costumes by designer Frank Labovitz seem clever extensions of the characters’ personalities, as, for instance, in the jaunty wool cap and pink sneakers he assigns to Warren. And Eric Shimelonis’s sound design ensures the musicality is at all times crisp.

A row of New York newspaper boxes radiates out from center stage, and at key moments they actually glow from within. That warmth is reinforced in DiVita’s touching rendition of Claire’s “I’ll Be Here,” the song in which she articulates her finding of peace, and that is further affirmed in Edgerly and Weaver’s final number, “Beautiful.” The set’s vaulting fire escape figures in the song as well, as it is the launch pad for a moment as joyfully eye-filling as any in that festive emblem of city life, the ticker-tape parade.

Didn’t I tell you that this musical should be such stuff as life is made on?

Ordinary Days

Music and lyrics by Adam Gwon. Directed by Matthew Gardiner. Music director, William Yanesh; set, Misha Kachman; costumes, Frank Labovitz; lighting, Justin Thomas; sound, Eric Shimelonis; dramaturg, Brent Stansell. About 85 minutes. Tickets, \$10-\$45. Through June 22 at Round House Theatre, 4545 East-West Hwy., Bethesda. Visit

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