

Stage Buzz

What's New in New York City Theatre

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Review - Count to Ten (Justin Boccitto and The Group Theatre Too)

Stage Buzz Review by Patrick Doyle

What do dance and love have in common? Both require confidence and commitment, which Victor and Madoc, the two leads in The Group Theatre Too's *Count to Ten*, are sorely lacking.

Victor (Justin Boccitto) is a composer, writer and choreographer, who has been involved in several flops on Broadway. He flees New York and heads to the Starwood Performing Arts Camp to spend time finishing his musical and potentially recharging his career. Madoc (Brian Merker), a camper, is his protégé and the leading player in Victor's newest musical. What do they have in common? Besides inexperience with women, lack of self confidence, being raised in broken households and their reluctance to show vulnerability...well it's almost easier to try and find the differences between the two (about 10 years in age). But both the adolescent and camp counselor need to learn a few things about life, love, and growing up. What better place to learn those lessons than in performing arts camp? And as the drama unfolds, the audience is carried along for the ride.

And as every would-be camper knows, you can't have a summer-themed show without having a love story. This show is no exception. From the innocent crushes between campers to the paternal surrogacy of campers and counselor, this show provides something for everyone. Although at times the story can be predictable, the audience gets exactly what it expects – a happy ending. And who doesn't love a happy ending?

Brian Merker playing Madoc, is an excellent choice for the 15 year old protégé. He portrays the irrationality that most 15 year old boys exhibit, yet shows enough tenderness that the audience is enamored with him. It's hard not to identify with him and his struggles.

As Traci, Madoc's love interest, Lexie Speirs shows a realistic naivety that charms both Madoc and the audience. When Traci later is emotionally hurt, the audience can commiserate with her embarrassment.

Claire Vaughn (Jennifer Avila) provides a wonderful maternal substitute for this hodgepodge of campers, and yet unlike most mothers, still finds the time to fall in love herself. Her relationship with Victor becomes the exact mirror of the camper's romance...often literally on the stage where one couple stands stage left, and the other stage right.

Steve Varnell (Jacob Burlas) is the bully, intent on terrorizing Madoc until he drops out of the camp show. That being said Burlas plays the role of bully more comically than menacing.

The cast is dynamic in their performances, especially in their tap dance numbers. Counselor and campers meet student and teacher (most of this cast has studied tap dance with the choreographer), and Mr. Blevins should be proud. Not only has he taught them some very difficult numbers, but they have

performed them flawlessly. And the specific talents of one particular young lady in the chorus can't be ignored. Several times, Katelyn Morgan's voice would carry forth distinctly from the rest of the chorus. At 16 years of age, this young lady has a very good chance of going far with her singing career.

As this play is sharing a performance space with another production, the set is nearly nonexistent except for a few small boxes. This production rather chooses to focus more on the story, the music, and more importantly, the dance performances. And while the music is solid, there aren't any particular standout hits. The closest is a fun song called 'Dear Mom and Dad' sung by the campers. What elevates the musical numbers is the outstanding work on the dancing done by the cast of *Count to Ten* and Mr. Blevins and the absolute enthusiasm with which the cast approaches their roles.

If you are a fan of tap dance, you should see this show. The tap dance numbers truly remarkable and the rhythmic nature of the show will stick with you for several days. Both young and old will find something to enjoy in *Count to Ten*.

Book: Michael Blevins

Lyrics: Michael Blevins, Beth Clary

Music: Michael Blevins, Scott Knipe, Bruce Sacks, David Wollenberger

Director: Michael Blevins

Musical Director: Christine Riley

Choreography: Michael Blevins

Wardrobe: Bob Flanagan

Production Manager: Cristina Marie

Lighting Design: Joyce Liao

Stage Manager: Greg Loproto

Art Direction: Alex Maxwell

Percussion: Jeff Brelvi

Technical Director: Paul Gregorio

Associate Producers: Denise Brysett, Doug Francisco, Mary Ann Penzero, Kenny Weiner, Lisa Weiner

Featuring: Justin Boccitto (Victor Chase), Jennifer Avila (Clair Vaughn), Brian Merker (Madoc Dean), Lexie Speirs (Traci Elizabeth Meyers), Jacob Burlas (Steve Varnell), Heather Lightcap (Rosie Busche), Hunter Gross (Nick Russo), Dylan Bush (Inez Glazier), Chris Kinsey (Biz Andrews), Doug Francisco (The Producer), Nick Ardito, Jenna Black, Michael Breslin, Mckenzie Custin, Steven Etienne, Brittany Hoehlein, Roman Micevic, Katelyn Morgan, Brandon Wiener.

The Connelly Theatre

220 East 4th Street

Between Avenue A & B

Closed March 16

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