



28 FEB, 2022

80s musical plays to #MeToo era

I P P U B L I C I T Y

Sydney Morning Herald, Sydney

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THEATRE

9 TO 5 THE MUSICAL

★★★★

Capitol Theatre, February 24.

Reviewed by **JOHN SHAND**

Who would have thought that *9 to 5 the Musical* could double the fun of the film?

Some will sniff that that's no great achievement, the film needing to be sharper, funnier and less silly. But the musical not only shrinks those flaws, it amplifies (more than sitting in a cinema did 42 years ago) the sense of attending a sporting event, with the home side Team Women. Violet's "why don't we just solve the problem by giving men and women equal pay for equal work?" detonates a huge cheer in the audience, like a winning goal has been scored.

In 1980, the Jane Fonda-initiated film became a box-office sensation by depicting women getting even for the chauvinism, sexism, power politics and pay disparities they copped in workplaces.

The wretched truth is that many issues persist, so the slightly flimsy story of Violet, Doralee and Judy turning the tables on with their execrable boss, Franklin Hart Jnr, not only remains pertinent, it now rides the #MeToo wave as well.

The music was written by the beloved Dolly Parton (who starred in the film beside Fonda and Lily Tomlin), with the book and lyrics by Patricia Resnick (who wrote the original screenplay). Their work vastly improves the film's comedy-to-silliness quotient.

Directed by Jeff Calhoun, choreographed by Lisa Stevens and designed by Tom Rogers, the show inserts a local cast into the West End production. But what a cast. Marina Prior is the savvy Violet, Casey Donovan the unworldly Judy and Erin Clare the put-upon Doralee, while Eddie Perfect is

more effective as the hideous Frank than Dabney Coleman was in the film, and Caroline O'Connor inhabits the expanded role of boss-fawning Roz.

Prior, Clare and Donovan ooze the necessary chemistry of complementary strengths and mutual dependence. Prior is credibly the leader, even as she's upstaged vocally by Donovan and Clare (who gets the show's best song in *Backwoods Barbie* - with "too much make-up, too much hair"). The story is partly one of Judy discovering her spine without losing her sweetness, and Donovan perfectly personifies this trajectory, culminating in receiving a standing ovation after carving up *Get Out and Stay Out*.

Perfect's diverting Frank is disturbingly close to Trump as he sings his fantasies about Doralee, and O'Connor has her own entertaining, grinding fantasy about Frank - as perverse as that is.

The strength of the performances and singing is more than matched by the staging and ensemble choreography, which peaks when Prior, now power-dressed in a white suit, sings *One of the Boys*, while shadowed by obsequious males. Even an ordinary song like *Around Here* is lent a bit of sizzle by the choreography.

The problem is that strong scenes or songs are too often followed by duds. Having amusingly fantasised about what they'd like to do to Frank, the women are mired in the pedestrian *Hey Boss*; the kidnapped Frank is saddled with the limp *Always a Woman*; and the sentimental *Let Love Grow* that Violet sings with Joe (Ethan Jones) is just awful.

But the show is much more often fun than lame. The use of projections is snappy without stealing our eyes from the performers, and the show's message

is received with uproarious enthusiasm at every turn.

As Violet puts it, women "want to be seen and treated as equal members of the human race."

You have to be as thick as Frank not to get that.

Until May 1.

Prior, Clare and Donovan ooze the necessary chemistry.



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The Australian production stars Erin Clare, Casey Donovan and Marina Prior. Photo: Steven Siewert