

GRAND CENTRAL PART 2

REVIEW

Last Friday, Newcastle's opulent Civic Theatre was the venue for the premiere of Grand Central, a new Australian musical with book, music and lyrics by David Reeves. With five professionally produced musicals to his credit, Reeves, along with Peter Pinne (nineteen musicals), is one of Australia's most prolific composers of original musicals. David Reeves' first musical, Seven Little Australians, is still the most commercially successful original Australian musical of the last twenty years produced in Australia. Now, with Grand Central, David Reeves has produced another fine, original score. Reeves' music is unique for its lyricism, sensitivity and melodic originality. In several outstanding solos and duets, he shifts the time signatures and keys quite freely, with great dramatic effect. When this is combined with polished ensemble vocal writing and strongly rhythmic dance numbers, Grand Central emerges as a musical on its way to success.

One of the "rules" of the musical theatre industry around the world, is that original stories seldom make hit musicals. Another is that musicals are generally built on collaboration between a composer and two or more writers. Reeves has broken both of these rules to create Grand Central. In the hands of a lesser talent, decisions like this would be very risky. However, with Grand Central, Reeves has achieved a high level of creative success. Grand Central is a bold, energetic, poignant and, remarkably topical musical with moving, original melodies and several foot-tapping dance numbers.

Grand Central is about Cubans in America, a sometimes illegal immigrant group who find themselves a long way down the social hierarchy. As recent events have shown, the status of "illegals" who have come to America in search of work, is a blazing hot issue. Grand Central is set in the recent past in Pablo's Bar, among the grandeur of New York's most famous station. Pablo (Freddie Hemara) himself is a Cuban refugee. Early in the piece he meets Maria, a sultry Cuban girl (beautifully played by rising star Maria Maroulis), woos her (singing "You and I" - a stand-out number) and begins to plan their life together. Pablo has created a world for other immigrants in New York where they can be accorded dignity and respect. These sentiments are powerfully expressed by Tyrone (Khalil Kharwa) in "One Day" the opening song of Act Two. Pablo is concerned about the plight of other Cubans and tries to help them, a decision which has tragic consequences. Along the way there are many opportunities for some big song and dance numbers, with the Mayor of New York arriving to offer Pablo the chance to contribute to the fiftieth anniversary celebrations for Grand Central Station. Despite its tragic elements, the musical ends hopefully "uplifted by David Reeves' music."

David Reeves' superb, original score weaves all of these elements together, to create an entertaining, original work with universal themes which Australians, accustomed to the challenges of immigration, can readily appreciate.

Peter Wyllie Johnston
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