

The Taffetas Review: Out of the Jukebox and Onto the Stage

By Michael Radtke

A homage to the girl-groups of the 1950s, *The Taffetas* catches up with a quartet of sisters (Kaye, Peggy, Cheryl and Donna) from the Midwest who are on their way to big-time stardom. (Which, for them, starts with the Ed Sullivan Show) In this play, *The Taffetas* are performing on a musical variety show; appearing on television for the first time; singing, dancing, and telling stories.



Being a musical revue, *The Taffetas* covers a wider range of 1950s hits than most “oldies” radio stations do. With selections from The Fontane Sisters, The Chordettes, and others, *The Taffetas* gives a nice sampling of songs from the well-known “golden oldies” to the forgotten gems, with many of the songs melded together into one of four medleys, covering subjects like travel and boys. These sets were blazing fast mash-ups of anywhere from four to fifteen songs, some even only getting a few letters in before jumping to the next one.

As such, this requires a very wide vocal range for all of the singers on stage. (Not to mention a certain level of expertise from the drummer, who often has to change time signatures multiple times within the span of a single minute.) Fortunately, the girls and the backing band seem to all be finely honed musicians; nailing the notes and chords with what seemed to be great ease. All four of *The Taffetas* (Samantha Dubina, Meredith Freyre, Danielle Plisz, and Courtney Rioux) showed a great vocal range that impressed the audience.



Aside from the music, *The Taffetas* attempts to tell the tale of these four sisters trying to make it big in show business. The audience viewing the play “acts” as an audience of a fictitious television show in New York in which *The Taffetas* are hosting. As a quartet, the sisters are portrayed as naive mid-westerners hoping to make their big break. In between the songs, however, the individual characters of each sister slowly come forth, portraying each sister as a kind of archetype of a 1950s girl-group member. You have the leader of the group, the sweet one, the wild one, and the what could be described as the smart one (for lack of a better term). The girl’s individual character is not apparent initially, but is brought out slowly over the course of the play via things like the



This kind of character development -brought about in tiny bits and pieces- while good in some instances, leaves this play somewhat lacking in depth. That may be the intention, true, but one can't help but maybe wonder about the struggles the girls endured on the road to New York- there just seems like there could be more to this play ,story-wise. Of course ***The Taffetas*** isn't meant to be on the level of, say, *Dreamgirls*, but with this reviewer, the amount of character development seemed somewhat lacking. But as mentioned, that may be part of the intention of the play: to focus on the music and give just enough back story to not overshadow the main element; making ***The Taffetas*** a light, fluffy 50s pop experience.

Overall, ***The Taffetas*** is a fun, nostalgic romp through the songs of the 1950s girl groups, where it really shines. The music and performers are all fantastic and do an excellent job of giving the audience an evening of energetic music and dance.



The Taffetas is showing at the **Pheasant Run Resort** in St. Charles, Il now through April 11, 2009. For tickets or for more information please visit www.noblefool.org or cal the theater box office at (630)584-6342.