

Schmigadoon! review: The Broadway adaptation is a 150-minute smile faithful to its Apple TV series roots

By Patrick Gomez

There's a moment early in Schmigadoon! — the new Broadway adaptation of the cult-favorite musical Apple TV series — when Melissa (Cecily Strong on screen, now brought to the stage by Sara Chase) marvels at the townspeople bursting into song. When the number ends, the entire cast is smiling from ear to ear. And so is the audience. The only one not enjoying themselves is Melissa's boyfriend, Josh (Alex Brightman, taking over from Keegan Michael-Key).

"Fun? It's Children of the Corn," he deadpans.

At least during last Thursday's performance, he seemed the only one in the Nederlander Theatre with that opinion.

A loving, winking, unabashedly cheesy valentine to Golden Age musicals, Schmigadoon! cherry-picks plotlines, melodies, and archetypes from Broadway classics Oklahoma!, Carousel, The Music Man, and dozens more — most notably Brigadoon. As in the 1947 Lerner and Loewe classic, our lead duo find themselves trapped in a mysterious land, in this case a town where everyone sings and dances as though they are in a musical. According to the leprechaun who magically appears when Josh and Melissa attempt to cross the bridge out of town only to find themselves in a loop returning to the town border, they will only be able to leave with their "true love."

Chase (fresh off 2024's *The Great Gatsby*) and Brightman (downright understated in this role after his Tony-nominated turns in *Beetlejuice* and *School of Rock*) have a charming lived-in chemistry together, but in this moment it is clear Josh and Melissa are not exuding true love. After an opening scene of their meet-cute at a hospital vending machine, Schmigadoon! whips us through the Manhattan doctors' first few years together, ending with them emotionally distant and lost in the forest during a failed couples' retreat.

The delightful quick set changes in this section — jumping from hospital break room to bedroom, with moving boxes materializing mid-transition — are Broadway stage magic (and three-time Tony winner Scott Pask's work) at its best. I'm told this is an extremely faithful adaptation of the TV shows' first season, but director and choreographer Christopher Gattelli (who just adapted *Death Becomes Her* for Broadway last year) makes the absolute most of the medium his show skewers so deliciously.

As you may have caught above, I haven't seen the series version of Schmigadoon!, despite sitting squarely in its target demo. So, while story elements were instantly familiar because of my decades

enjoying the classics of the genre, the jokes and songs were all fresh to me. That said, there's plenty new for the superfan to enjoy as well (four new musical numbers, tweaked lyrics and plotlines). If my audience's reaction was any indication, the mere appearance of the Schmigadoon town sign and the simple utterance of the words "corn puddin'" are enough to send them into rapturous laughter and applause.

The Schmigadoon! team's "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" approach works here (maybe a playbook last year's Smash should have followed). In large part, it's successful because of the cast (assembled by Bernard Telsey and Kristian Charbonier, who ironically also casted Smash... though casting wasn't that show's issue).

In the Playbill, every ensemble member has a character name — and not just for show. Each of the 23 performers convey fully formed characters, whether they're Josh and Melissa or townspeople Pete (So You Think You Can Dance alum Jess LeProtto, who stands out with just a smattering of moments throughout the show).

The swaggering, Billy Bigelow-esque carnival barker Danny Bailey (Max Clayton), makes Melissa — and the audience — swoon with his ultra-smooth vocals and equally smooth execution of Gattelli's crisp, reverent, and playful choreography, which captures the spirit of mid-century Broadway without feeling museum-like.

The relentlessly chipper farmer's daughter Betsy McDonough is a star-making showcase for McKenzie Kurtz, whose performance as the boy-crazy country bumpkin feels like an instant awards contender. From her impeccable comic timing to small, delightful choices (a perfectly executed cross-eyed gag among them), she commands attention every time she steps on stage.

Saturday Night Live all-star Ana Gasteyer makes excellent use of her limited stage time as the preacher's wife, Florence Menlove, delivering cutting one-liners with surgical precision — including a particularly sharp retort rejecting a "nice" Bible passage in favor of "one of the mean ones." It's the kind of role that feels tailor-made for her, and she relishes it. There's a (non-fantastical) world in which she and Kurtz are both vying for the supporting actress Tony come June.

It's fitting that a Saturday Night Live actor is among the mix, and not just because the TV version had one in Cecily Strong. Perhaps it's because the show is fresh out of previews, but the Schmigadoon! cast genuinely seems to make each other laugh (though only betraying themselves with an endearing quiver of a grin, rather than an annoying full Jimmy Fallon breakdown).

The audience also laughs plenty, something the onscreen actors didn't have to contend with between jokes. Despite being so early in the show's run, the cast demonstrates an innate sense of timing — allowing jokes to breathe without sacrificing pace. Key to this is filling the spaces between lines, something Chase and Brightman do masterfully while they pause between each line for the ensemble to sing about their bickering during "Lovers' Spat."

Even if Danny and Melissa's cyclical bickering and reconciliation can get repetitive, the slight condensing of the source material (minus intermission, the show only runs about 35 minutes less than season 1's six episodes) combined with the momentum of live theater makes that repetition easier to forgive.

Beyond that, if there's a complaint to be made, it's that the show occasionally feels almost too efficient. The curtain call, in particular, rushes by when you're not quite ready to leave this world behind. After 150 minutes of near-constant smiles, you may find yourself wishing — unlike Josh — that the bridge out of Schmigadoon stayed closed just a little longer. Grade: A