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## ‘Schmigadoon!’ Review: Oh, What a Beautiful Sendup

By Elisabeth Vincentelli

*Critic’s Pick*



A sendup of musicals needs to fulfill three major requirements: It must know its stuff inside out, it must be precisely crafted, and of course, it must be funny. Let’s just dispense with the suspense: Cinco Paul’s [“Schmigadoon!”](#) hits the trifecta. This new Broadway show, which opened on Monday at the Nederlander Theater, is a blast.

Actually, calling it “new” should be qualified to some degree. “Schmigadoon!” may be running on Broadway, but it’s based on Season 1 of the Apple TV+ series of the same title, which premiered in 2021, and the stage version was first introduced last year at the [Kennedy Center in Washington](#).

More important, Paul's book and score are packed with plot points from and references to classic musicals, including "Carousel," "The Sound of Music" and "Oklahoma!" You don't need to have memorized the Rodgers and Hammerstein songbook to have a good time, but knowledge of some musical-theater fundamentals adds an extra layer — or 10 — to the enjoyment.

The premise itself comes straight from Lerner and Loewe's "Brigadoon," in which a pair of tourists stumble upon a mysterious hamlet that manifests to the outside world once every 100 years. Here they are Josh Skinner ([Alex Brightman](#), a Tony Award nominee for "Beetlejuice" and "School of Rock — The Musical") and Melissa Gimble (Sara Chase, "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt" and "The Great Gatsby"), doctors whose relationship has hit a rough patch. Lost in the woods during a couples retreat, they cross a bridge and find themselves in [Schmigadoon, which is both a village and a mind-set](#), a place stuck in ye good ol' days of petticoats, shoppes and straw boater hats, and where the locals keep breaking into musical numbers.



"What is happening?" Josh asks, as the townspeople belt the show's title song, which closely echoes the one from "Oklahoma!" "And who are they singing to?"

Under the high-energy direction of [Christopher Gattelli](#), the two visitors meet, in quick succession, everybody who matters, including a couple of lusty temptations. As Betsy McDonough, a flirtatious farmer's daughter clearly inspired by Ado Annie from "Oklahoma!," McKenzie Kurtz (already a standout in ["The Heart of Rock and Roll"](#) two seasons ago) gives us a comic creation for the ages, pursuing Josh with a maniacal laugh and a huge smile that freezes her face in a Looney Tunes version of "The Scream."

Max Clayton is just as memorable as a nicer version of Billy Bigelow from “Carousel” called Danny Bailey, whom the Bible-thumping, book-burning Mildred Layton (Ana Gasteyer) deems “a scoundrel, a rascalion and — pardon my Jewish — a nogoodnik!” These, and Danny’s high-waisted pants, are attributes Melissa finds irresistible. (Linda Cho designed the vivid costumes.)

While Josh stubbornly resists the ways of the land — which, unfortunately, means Brightman doesn’t get much to sing — his girlfriend immediately takes to Schmigadoon, down to join in the songs. She is the perfect proxy for the audience, especially as she often supplies caustic footnotes during the numbers. When the mayor’s wife, Florence Menlove (Ann Harada, reprising her role from the series), sings of her obviously closeted husband (Brad Oscar) “He’s not the kind of man who gawks at other gals / In fact he treats the female race as if we were his pals,” Melissa chimes in with “This was literally me in high school.”



Melissa’s asides are very funny — and Chase is hilarious in the role, finding myriad shades in the most innocuous-sounding lines — but they also remind us that the world that inspired Schmigadoon could be bigoted, judgmental, close-minded, sexist. Melissa is a doctor, yet in this universe she can only be a nurse to Doc (Ivan Hernandez). “Schmigadoon!” is less an exercise in nostalgia than a reminder that those beloved Golden Age musicals had intentionally sanded the edges of a bygone era that, for many people, was far from enchanted.

Happily, Paul is affectionate without being misty-eyed, sharp without being sanctimonious. In a way “Schmigadoon!” is as much about classic musical theater as it is about the power of fantasy and Americans’ emotional investment in storytelling. Josh is a doubter, telling Melissa that “musicals are so fake. People don’t just burst into song like that in real life.” She quickly sets him straight: “OK, I don’t want to make you sad,” she replies, “but light sabers aren’t real.”

What does feel real here is the pinpoint precision with which the production operates, starting with Paul’s judicious adaptation of the six-episode season — the stage show actually flows better than the televised original. Sure, there are still bumps, especially with characters entering and leaving the plot willy-nilly. Betsy pretty much disappears in Act II, but that’s when the schoolmarm Emma Tate (Isabelle McCalla) steps up, flanked by the pint-size, lispng little boy Carson (Ayaan Diop).



Besides missing the performers who recede into the background and wishing for more of the ones who materialize only occasionally, I can't say that this unevenness bothered me. So what if the character of Nancy (Lyrica Woodruff) is pulled from the ensemble mainly to tee up Melissa's song "Baby Talk"? That uproarious spoof of "Do-Re-Mi" would excuse any book massaging. The scene also demonstrates Paul's facility with lines ready for actors to chomp on. "Where does the baby come out?," Nancy asks Melissa. "I feel like there are a couple of options, but they both seem CRAZY!" (Woodruff's mix of naïveté and horror is flawless.)

Gattelli, whose production of "[Death Becomes Her](#)" is another illustration of old-school musical comedy done well, had already choreographed the TV series, and he is perfectly in sync with the show's aesthetic world. (So is Scott Pask, whose set relies heavily on painted backdrops that flaunt a two-dimensional brightness.)

Gattelli excels at big ensemble numbers like "Corn Puddin'" (which won an Emmy Award for outstanding original music and lyrics in 2022) or "Cross That Bridge." But even more satisfying is his ability to showcase triple-threat performers who can segue from acting to singing to dancing and back again. It's exciting to watch McCalla further explore the versatility she had revealed as a closeted high schooler in "[The Prom.](#)" As for Melissa and Danny's duet "Enjoy the Ride," it is a giddy pleasure. That it includes a random "boink boink" that might be a wink to Bob Fosse ("[Steam Heat.](#)" maybe?) is the elective cherry on an already delicious sundae.

In a final flourish — the one time when "Schmigadoon!" veers close to schmaltz — the show ends with the townspeople coming out of their figurative straitjackets and a number, "How We Change," in the vein of Stephen Sondheim and Stephen Schwartz, that suggests a possible next chapter. I won't complain if Paul gets the chance to adapt the series' second season, where Josh and Melissa land in "Schmicago."