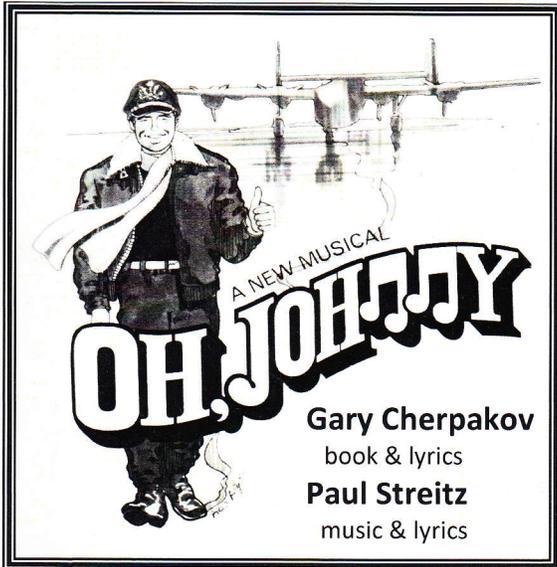


SHOW BUSINESS

Reviews



OH, JOHNNY

at the Off Center Theatre
436 West 18 Street
929-8299

Review by **MERLE GINSBERG**

***** (excellent)

opened 12/1/79
seen 12/7/79
closes 12/22/79

Once in a great while, an Off-Broadway musical comes along, written and directed by very talented people, that deserves a big break. It makes you laugh, makes you cry, and leaves you humming its tunes as you leave the theatre.

This is the case with Paul Streitz's **OH, JOHNNY**, a new musical at the Off Center Theatre. Mr. Streitz has produced the play, written the book, and created some of the lyrics. Along with Gary Cherpakov (music and lyrics) he has given us a show worthy of a meeting between "South Pacific" and "Flower Drum Song."

The play opens with a trio of 1940s "radio girls" (complete with rolled hair and padded shoulders) singing their hearts out to America's soldiers: World War II is on. Johnny Powers (wonderfully and innocently played by Ken Arthur) and Gopher Higgins (the charming Joseph Adams) are two boys on a

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farm in Wyoming. Johnny convinces Gopher that they must join the Air Force to aid their country and meet some women (they do more of the latter).

All the subsequent scenes are in China, where Johnny and Gopher have more adventures than they've bargained for. They frequent the Pearl of the Orient Bar & Grill, where a voluptuous chanteuse named Lili (Nazig Edwards is nothing less than fabulous) sings "Boost the Morale" to cheer up the GIs. The dancing and singing are lively and a joy to watch—thanks to Alan Weeks's riotous and slick choreography (he was the Wiz in "The Wiz").

Meanwhile, Colonel Tripp (played by Jerry Coyle, who is a trip) sends the boys off on a dangerous mission to Japanese-occupied China. Before they go, they try to teach him how to woo Lili, and sing "We Can Handle Women."

Of course, we soon find out that they can't, when they come up against the White Lotus (the lovely Patricia Woo) and One China (Randon Lo). However, war and romance make great bedfellows, and some beautiful Oriental-tinged love songs follow: "Song of the Orient," "Ancient Oriental Custom," and "Dance Around the World with Me."

Director Howard Rossen's skillful staging raises **OH, JOHNNY** to Broadway standards. The costumes by Gene Galvin, the sets by James Chesnutt, and the lights by Mal Sturchio all add to the charm. The Off-Center Theatre's intimate environment is a good place for this show—but a Broadway house might be a better one!

CREDITS

The Off Center Theatre presents **OH, JOHNNY**; book & lyrics, Paul Streitz; music & lyrics, Gary Cherpakov; director, Howard Rossen; scenery, James Chesnutt; costumes, Gene Galvin; lights, Mal Sturchio; choreography, Alan Weeks; musical direction & arrangements, Robert Marks. CAST: Valerie Piacenti, Helena Grenot, Cydni Mitchell, Ken Arthur, Joseph Adams, Nazig Edwards, Jeffery Brocklin, Clayton Davis, David C. Wright, Jerry Coyle, Joey Ginza, Patricia Woo, Randon Lo.