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West End Edition

Master escapologist didn't escape me!

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I finally got around to seeing the Segal Centre's production of "Houdini" last week. I'll just preface my comments with the very truthful declaration that I don't usually like musicals. While I absolutely adore live theatre, musicals sometimes try my patience; just when the story starts moving along, everyone breaks into song and dance! I mean, seriously... can you imagine if real life were like that?

However, after speaking to writer Ben Gonshor and composer Elan Kunin for an article I wrote a few weeks ago, their youthful enthusiasm and sincere desire to just see people have a good time rubbed off on me and I decided to ignore my regular aversion to all things musical and see what the fuss was about.

The Segal has a hit on its hands. This is a first-class story, told by a first-rate cast, benefiting from solid production values. The singing, the choreography, the costume and set design are spot on. It certainly doesn't hurt that the talent on stage is accompanied by a six-member live band that plays its heart out all night long. Of course the story and the Vaudevillian period it takes place in certainly lends itself to the musical format, which is why it completely succeeds in sucking you in.

The diminutive Bryna Wasserman has her hands all over this huge production and it shows. Kevin Kraft delivers as Houdini, while special mention must go to Valerie Boyle, who had the crowd howling as Harry's overbearing, guilt-inducing Jewish mother. Holly Gauthier-Frankel was a sassy delight, while Paul McQuillan was utterly engaging as Martin Beck, Houdini's manager.

The Segal has succeeded in creating a highly entertaining homegrown production and kudos should also go to Alain Simard and his Spectra team for taking a chance on an English production in a predominantly French town. Something tells me the Segal may have bigger plans for this production and it wouldn't surprise me in the least.

Houdini runs until March 2, as part of the Montreal High Lights Festival. For a magical evening (pardon the pun), I would encourage you to get your hands on some tickets.

Podworthy indeed!

Once again the City of Côte St. Luc manages to come up with some original ways to engage younger residents in daily municipal life. The latest idea? CSL residents who are subscribed to the city's free newsletter by February 29 have a chance of winning one of three iPod shuffles. Just go to www.cotesaintluc.org and register. They only need your email address. Quick and cost effective, emails are a great complement to traditional methods of relaying information.