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### SLAPSTICK, CLICHÉ, CHEESE AND HAM WITH UNIFORM BRILLIANCE

PRINT VERSION



Photo by Hagen Hopkinsef

#### SINGIN' IN THE RAIN

Screenplay by Betty Comden and Adolph Green  
 Songs by Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed  
 Choreographer Andrew Wright  
 Director Jonathan Church  
 Designer Simon Highett  
 presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International, New York, NY.  
[www.mtishows.com](http://www.mtishows.com)

at Civic Theatre, Auckland  
Until 24 May 2015

Reviewed by [Kate Ward-Smythe](#), 3 May 2015

If you let nostalgia wash over you and embrace this lavish depiction of Hollywood in 1927, a time when the industry is a whirl of uncertainty and insecurity as 'talkies' start replacing silent movies, then this honorable retelling of a simple upbeat love story, made famous by the 1952 MGM movie, will fully captivate your imagination.

In particular, when director Jonathan Church unleashes the extravagant company numbers, full of sass and style – with Andrew Wright's high-octane choreography and Simon Higlett's sumptuous set design and costumes, all precisely and beautifully lit by Tim Mitchell in a way that could simply be described as art – this production simply soars.

Add to that highly theatrical mix more than 12,000 litres of water and the 'feel good' factor in the audience is palpable.

Higlett's grand design is impressive and intriguingly historically correct. For example, the famous sign on the hill is as per the original 1923 commission by the real estate agent who paid for it. His eye for detail is

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impeccable, no more so than in the gorgeous black and white film segments which, when combined with video director Ian William Galloway's obvious sense of fun, are delicious to watch. Long self-indulgent kisses, unrealistic sword fighting and melodramatic swooning, combined with Musical Director Louis Zurnamer's well-timed live orchestral accompaniment, cement the movie segments as absolute highlights.

Much respect goes to the cast for their effortless ensemble connection, as well as to every one of the 28 performers, for their full investment in their every move, step and note. The energy and hubbub of the opening, set 'behind the scenes' at a busy Hollywood studio, is particularly sensational. Church uses this gifted cast brilliantly as we move smoothly from scene to scene, so that the whole evening feels like a rolling journey, rather than a series of set ups.

In between the colourful company moments, all the leads are full of perk and have immense fun with the simple story line and comedy – which is pure slapstick, cliché, cheese and ham. Bethany Dickson, last seen here as Maria in *The Sound of Music*, is equally stunning in the role of Kathy Selden. Grant Almirall as Don Lockwood marks his NZ debut with a charming and joyful rendition of 'Singin' in the Rain'. Steven van Wyk as the irrepressible Cosmo Brown is sensational in 'Make 'em Laugh' and is every bit the triple threat required to pull it off with polish and flair. When they combine for 'Good Morning', the fabulous three are pure sparkle.

Not to be out done by the dynamic trio, Taryn-Lee Hudson as the shrill Lina Lamont, gives a knockout performance. Acting out singing badly is extremely hard to do and Hudson absolutely nails it. Anne Power as Dora is suitably over the top; Kenneth Meyer is impressive as the dialect coach in 'Moses Supposes'; James Borthwick as R F Simpson and Mark Richardson as Roscoe Dexter both fill their roles admirably. Finally, dancer Mila De Biaggi delivers a breath taking star performance during 'Broadway Ballet'.

While initially intonation is an issue, the hard working orchestra does well with Larry Wilcox and Larry Blank's complex score, which is brimming with notes, often played at an unrelenting pace.

What a wonderful thing it is to step back in time and fully appreciate the wonder of such a glamorous era. The opening night audience – who are attentive, appreciative and listening from the start – jump to their feet en masse for a well-deserved standing ovation at the end of the night. Because the most memorable moments of the night for me personally are when the full chorus is unleashed, I find it fitting that the finale, a rousing reprise of 'Singin' In the Rain', stars the full company in uniform. Wearing the same costumes, dancing the same steps, these 28 fine performers, are uniformly brilliant.

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