

Review: Noises Off

By **Regina Belt-Daniels**[Email](#)

Feb. 17, 2020

I'm setting the bar pretty high here for future performances, but darn it!, I can't find a single thing wrong with the Metropolis production of "Noises Off." There's not a weak link anywhere. The timing, the pacing, that cast, line delivery, costumes, sound, lights and the set are all extraordinary.

Acerbic theater critic Frank Rich (aka "the Butcher of Broadway") called "Noises Off" "the funniest play ever written in my lifetime." And under the direction of Joe Lehman, the Metropolis' production lives up to that statement with relentless, unstoppable laughter.

British playwright Michael Frayn wrote "Noises Off" in 1982; he had observed a performance of Lynn Redgrave in "The Two of Us" from the wings, and realized what happened backstage was funnier than what was happening onstage. The title comes from the theatrical stage direction indicating sounds coming from offstage. To Frayn's credit he has rewritten and updated "Noises Off" and it has become a favorite of professional and community theater from Broadway to Australia, even as difficult as it can be to execute. And probably more than any other play, the magnificent revolving stage (designed for this production by Evan Frank) and props (oh, those sardines! Thank you, Theresa Neumayer) quickly become characters in their own right.

"Noises Off" is a three-act play within a play, a bold comedy with enough falling trousers, slamming doors, slapstick and pratfalls to categorize it as a farce. It showcases the demise, or train wreck if you will, of a theatrical company on tour throughout Britain. The resulting chaos stems from a fair amount of actors' egos, insecurities, personal lives and, of course, passionate love affairs. Each act is a slight variation of the preceding act.

Act One occurs the night before the opening of the play "Nothing On" with a largely ill-prepared cast and a Cambridge-educated director being driven into all kinds of desperation. Act Two is seen from backstage during a matinee for retirees. The company has been on the road together for a month, and great dramas are occurring in the dressing rooms and backstage. And Act Three, probably the most hysterical of all judging from the audience reaction, is a performance being given at the end of the play's run. Relations have curdled, the set is literally falling apart, props are in the wrong places, lines are missed and there's ridiculous ad-libbing – well, you get the idea.

As for the cast, I don't think I possess enough adjectives to laud this incredibly talented ensemble. The amount of energy, the flawlessness of their stage movement (in thanks to R & D Fight Choreography), and the lines delivered with elan, proper accents and precision is consistently excellent. These actors ARE their characters, finely honed.

"Noises Off"'s female characters are delightfully, engagingly and whimsically portrayed by Julie Partyka (the weary matinee favorite Dotty/Mrs. Clackett), Sarah Kmiecik (ingenue starlet Brooke/Vicki), Meg Elliot (mother hen/peacemaker Belinda/Flavia) and Kelsey Tuma (innocent stage manager Poppy). Their male counterparts are played with rich savyness and ingenious humor by Evan Cullinan (wayward Tim), Rian Jairell (insecure Freddy/Philip), Tom Ochocinski (the veteran drunk actor Selson/burglar), Neil Stratman (deliciously jealous Garry/Roger) and Guy Wicke (the perfect theater director Lloyd). This is a seductive and luminous ensemble that play well together if not without bumps, bruises, and weight loss after the strenuous activity of this production.

Thirty-eight years later, "Noises Off" still is making audiences laugh. You owe it to yourself to join in; you won't be able to stop yourself from making some noise of the very appreciative kind for this production.

- Regina Belt-Daniels has been involved with theater since the first grade when she was cast as a rather bossy Mother Goose. She continues to do what she loves best: teach, act, direct, travel with her husband and write theater reviews. In her free time, she serves enthusiastically on theater boards in northern Illinois.