

Ophelia

Music by Jeffrey Weissman
Book & Lyrics by Antonia Tancredi
Directed by Nancy Hancock
Wings Theatre Company
154 Christopher St. (627 2960)
Equity showcase (closes Mar. 10)
Review by Ken Jaworowski

Ophelia, a new musical at Wings Theatre, has more ambition than any five musicals on Broadway. Alas, it's also saddled with nearly as many flaws. Indeed, Ophelia is not just filled with promising actors and ideas $\frac{3}{4}$ it's overflowing with them, spilling beyond the brim rather than risking a drop less, and delivering enthusiastic shouts when confident whispers would serve better.

Although billed as Shakespeare's Hamlet seen through another character's eyes, Ophelia stands on its own as the tale of a young woman doomed by her love. The story begins with Hamlet a few days away from leaving for the University of Wittenberg. He and Ophelia part with promises of marriage and are soon reunited after the death of the King. Laertes too falls in love with Ophelia and is tortured by his incestuous longings until he discovers Ophelia is not his sister, but is instead the once-deserted child of Claudius and a woman of the court. Ophelia learns she is pregnant with Hamlet's child and is driven to madness and suicide $\frac{3}{4}$ not by the murder of Polonius but by the scheming of a jealous Gertrude.

The most blaring fault in the production was, quite simply, the overpoweringly loud music. Sitting to the right of the audience, six musicians played remarkably well, but their strength overwhelmed the voices on stage, requiring those in the seats to lean forward and struggle to hear the lyrics; the volume could have been reduced by half without complaint.

As Ophelia, Amy Decker was well-cast. Her voice, the only one successful enough to consistently rise above the music, was clear and held a wide range of emotions. Chan Harris's Hamlet was both wide-eyed in his early innocence and sufficiently raving after his father's death. Steve Steiner as Polonius and Christopher Lynn as Laertes were also capable in both performance and song, although during one solo Lynn could as well have been lip-synching under the overpowering orchestra. Nancy Hancock's direction, while keeping the action snappy, at times broke into a sprint which left her cast winded. With 30 listed scenes and 20 musical numbers, she had a lot to squeeze into two hours and 20 minutes.

Jeffrey Weissman's music needed a lighter touch at times, in energy as well as in volume; if every song strives to arouse or excite, none will adequately do so. Yet Weissman is certainly talented, and did a fine job creating mood and supporting Antonia Tancredi's lyrics. Tancredi's book was inventive, chewing on some famous scenes, such as Hamlet's meeting with Ophelia (You know not what you've done/You should become a nun) with both playfulness and sobriety. The show's

best number, "Skoal! Let Us Drink to It All" was a fantastic crowd-pleaser, and an example of the spirited potential of the show.

Ophelia is so ambitious an undertaking that the attempt alone should be commended. Add to this a capable cast and crew, and Ophelia emerges not as a disappointment but rather as a project that reached too far and, if pulled back a bit, holds promise of a fine production. Let's hope we will see $\frac{3}{4}$ and hear $\frac{3}{4}$ a revised version in the future.

(Also featuring Cherilyn Bacon, John Dewar, J.T. Cromwell, Alyson Reim and Jennifer Ahia. Musicians: Justin Spidel, D. Marc Tagle, Tama Waipara, Benjamin Morgan, Andy Beall, Bernard Vallandingham.)