

Despite exhausting script, *Noises Off* must go on

Even though several actors are out of commission, director Bob Baker's remaining cast does its best to sell the trying performances

theatre review

Noises Off

Runs until 14 October
Directed by Bob Baker
Starring Ashley Wright, John Kirkpatrick, and Tom Wood
Citadel Theatre

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Arts & Entertainment Staff

Noises Off, directed by Bob Baker and written by Michael Frayn, follows a simple plot: it's a play within a play, where everything that can go wrong does.

The list of scripted glitches acted out is long, ranging from set malfunctions to misplaced sardines to actors being nowhere in sight just minutes before they're supposed to be on stage, and more; it all makes for some excellent comedic fodder.

Unfortunately, there were some unscripted malfunctions during this Citadel production of *Noises Off*. Mere days before the show was to open, Citadel veteran Julien Arnold, set to play the main role of Frederick, suffered a heart attack and is currently in the hospital. Preview shows were cancelled, and Ashley Wright, another Citadel veteran, was called to fill Arnold's shoes. In just three days, Wright learned his part.

But if that wasn't enough unscripted trouble, John Kirkpatrick, cast in the role of director Lloyd Dallas, was called away on opening night due to a family emergency and the opening night had to be cancelled. But, as the saying goes, "the show must go on," and so it did.

James MacDonald the Citadel's associate artistic director was called to temporarily fill Kirkpatrick's role, and a day after the play was supposed to open, it did just that.

Considering that one of the actors had three days, and another a mere six hours to learn their respective parts, the acting is remarkable. Wright's performance as Frederick is bang on. MacDonald may have had to subtly carry a script at times, but his acting was characteristically professional. Tom Wood, playing Selson the burglar, continues to live up to the high standard he's created for himself in previous Citadel productions, and Matthew MacFadzean, in the role of Garry, carries the play to new heights with the intensity he brings to his role.

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Finally, making her Citadel debut is the dazzling Melissa MacPherson. MacPherson's character, Brooke, is a bit of a tart who, evidently, isn't afraid of showing serious skin. The role demands that she be part of the joke without appearing wise to it—a more difficult task than some may believe, but one that MacPherson manages to pull off successfully.

Special congratulations are due to Meredith Scott, the dialect coach for this production, as all the actors speak flawlessly in British accents. Likewise,

Leslie Frankish and Robert Thomson deserve some recognition for their work on set and costume design, and lighting design, respectively—all of these details add nicely to the play without distracting from it.

But, despite the excellent acting and well-oiled technical aspects in *Noises Off*, the script itself is flawed. Jokes return three, four, sometimes a dozen times through the course of the play and quickly lose their punch. Because of this, the audience can't help but feel bogged down at times, despite the rapid-fire energy the actors maintain on stage.

It's not just the jokes that are drawn out, but the plot as well. The first act follows the dress rehearsal a day before opening night; the second act showcases the backstage antics once the play has been running for a month; and the third act exhibits what the play has degenerated to six months later as it tours around the country.

The first act is almost a play by itself, and indeed, some audience members seemed to think that the end of the first act was actually the end of the play. The second act is convoluted and muted and, overall, not at all what it could be, and the third act would have just been déjà-vu, except the actors performed it with such chaotic energy that the play within the play still captivated the audience the third time around.

Overall, mostly because of the weak second act, *Noises Off* seems about 30 minutes too long. So while the attitude of "the show must go on" that Baker has so obviously taken to heart is admirable, there remains one lingering question: must the show go on for two and a half hours?



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