

THE DAILY GAZETTE

THE LOCALLY OWNED VOICE OF THE CAPITAL REGION

MONDAY, MAY 7, 2007

THEATER REVIEW

'Reunion' has something for everyone

Story of Lincoln told through old songs, diaries

BY CAROL KING

For the Daily Gazette

TROY — There are so many thrilling reasons to attend NYSTT's production of "Reunion: A Musical Epic in Miniature" that I will undoubtedly fail, in the space of this column, to mention them all. The show is for history buffs, fans of musical theater, people who adore drama or comedy or pageantry; in short it has something for everybody.

The play is set in April 1890, and Victorian-era entrepreneur Harry Hawks (Joel Aroeste), is presenting a show called "Reunion! The American Iliad." In the play within a play, his company of actors leads the audience through the chronicle of events that marked the Civil War period, 30 years earlier. We are transported — and that is the correct word — through the election of Abraham Lincoln, to his

'Reunion: A Musical Epic In Miniature'

WHERE: New York State Theatre Institute, Schacht Fine Arts Center, Russell Sage College, Troy
WHEN: Through May 19
HOW MUCH: \$20-\$10
MORE INFO: 274-3256

storied battles with General McClellan (David Bunce), to his assassination in April of 1865. The playwright, Jack Kyrieleison, has chosen songs from that time and actual letters and excerpts from diaries of the people who lived through it, to tell the story.

SOARING VOICES

From the opening number "Darling Nelly Gray" sung by a Minstrel Trio (David Gould, Brandon Jones, and Brian Sheldon), to "Tenting On the Old Camp Ground," an anti-war song gorgeously sung by The Soldier (David Girard), to the moving "Beautiful Dreamer," sung by The Abolitionist (Anny De Gange), the production gives each cherished song its fullest meaning and depth. The actors, to a performer, gift the



BRUCE SQUIERS/GAZETTE PHOTOGRAPHER
Laiona Michelle and Ivan Thomas perform in a scene from "Reunion."

audience with not only stupendous energy, but voices that soar.

Laiona Michelle plays Cassie and the Dressmaker. As Cassie, she stops the show with her performance of "Wasn't That a Wide River," and again, with Hannibal (Ivan Thomas) and Company, in "Heav'n Bound Soldier." Thomas is mesmerizing in "Battle Cry of Freedom!" and every other song sings.

PRESIDENT NEVER SEEN

The Secretary, played by Gary Lynch, masterfully carries the audience through the historical

events as Lincoln's confidante. And, though he is never seen, it is the character and personality of that great president that dominates the show. The Secretary refers to him as "The Tycoon" and to Mrs. Lincoln as "The Hellcat."

Ron Komora is hilarious as A Tragedian who plays Shakespeare for the president. Carol Edie Smith gives a thoroughly comedic performance as the Temperance Lady, especially in the number "Comrades, Fill No Glass for Me," which she performs with Bunce, Girard and the Do-Gooders (Alyson Lang and Alexandra Tarantelli). And Mort Hess lends his fine theatrical voice and presence to New Yorker 2 and General Pope, who replaced McClellan for a short period.

Lights by John McLain are quite simply magnificent, creating the theatrical technology of the Victorian era as well as some surprising effects. Costumes by Karen Kammer define the characters and the period with expertise. They are eye-pleasing and authentic.

The director, Ron Holgate, who also worked on the story with Kyrieleison, must be praised for a job beautifully done.