

'Reunion: A Musical Epic in Miniature' teaches and entertains.



Courtesy MBT



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Reunion: A Musical Epic in Miniature

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How can we describe the show now playing at **Meadow Brook Theatre**?

Start by thinking about **Ken Burn's 10-hour documentary** on the Civil War. Then do a mash up with a late 1800s **melodrama** – the likes of which Abraham Lincoln himself might have watched at **Ford's Theatre**. Add 26 authentic period songs and distil the whole thing down into a tight two-act play. The result is an entertaining 'Epic in Miniature',

just as the name implies.

Significantly, the show's official opening marked Lincoln's birthday.

We only wish this play was around when we were studying Civil War history in junior high school.

'Reunion: A Musical Epic in Miniature' is set in a modern civil war museum ... but the perspective of the story begins twenty-five years after the assassination of President Lincoln. The concept is that **Harry Hawks** – the actor who happened to be on stage when the

President was shot – now has his own traveling group of actors and singers.

It's this troupe that presents tales of the Civil War and our nation's struggle to remain the *United States of America*. The actors give voice to actual journal entries and letters from eyewitnesses. Source material was culled from the writings and memoirs of the likes of Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth, Louisa May Alcott, Harriet Tubman and Walt Whitman. This is balanced by voices equally compelling but unknown – the nurses, preachers, writers, slaves, soldiers and spies who lived through a war that left no American untouched.

Jack Kyrieleison and Ron Holgate created the story, with book by Jack Kyrieleison and traditional music arranged by Michael O'Flaherty. The songs are often stirring, sometimes silly, but always authentic. The singing ranges from lyrical and sweet to strong and spiritual, and the talented cast does a fine job of selling these songs to a modern audience. Kudos to musical director Stacy White, choreographer Jennifer George-Consiglio, and the talented band.

MBT favorite Tobin Hissong, most recently seen in *A Christmas Carol*, plays the actor Harry Hawk, who is delightfully smarmy as Gen. McClellan. Eric Gutman, from this season's hit *Dracula: A Rock Opera* is Augustin Lovecraft and gives a moving performance as Lincoln's secretary. The cast is rounded out by Rob Arbaugh, Leslie Ann Handelman, Satori Shakoor, Cassandra Drumwright, and David Aron Damane.

The play is directed by Travis W. Walter, MBT artistic director, who knows how to delight his audience. A clever set design by Brian Kessler creates the feeling of a museum diorama come to life. The period costumes by Liz Moore are an added bonus.

'Reunion: A Musical Epic in Miniature' runs through March 6, 2011, at Meadow Brook Theatre, on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester, Mich.

Tickets range from \$24 to \$39 and are available by calling the Meadow Brook Theatre box office at 248-377-3300 or going **online**. Student discounts are available at the box office. Groups of eight or more should call 248-370-3316 for group pricing. (Attention -- school teachers -- this would be a worthwhile outing.) The schedule includes an American Sign

Language interpreted performance on Wednesday, Feb. 24 at 8:00 p.m.

This production of "Reunion: A Musical Epic in Miniature" is made possible through the continued support of Extended Stay Hotels, the Meadow Brook Theatre Guild, the Observer and Eccentric Newspapers, and AT&T Yellow Pages.