

'Evita' revival hits the right notes

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Caroline Bowman sings the title role in *Evita*. A revival of the Tony-winning musical plays through this weekend at the Buell Theater.
Photo by Richard Termine, courtesy of Denver Center for the Performing Arts

Tony-winner plays Buell Theater through Jan. 26

By Peter Jones

As rumor has it, Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber were mulling a new musical version of *Peter Pan* before they finally settled on the life of the beloved Argentinean first lady Eva Peron. If that is true, it is little wonder that the fabled Peron nearly flies across the stage in *Evita*.

Like so many revived musicals, *Evita* has gradually become more of a sensory experience of memorable tunes than an involving narrative told in song. The pop opera's emotion lies in its singing and production values. Aside from the cinematic visuals atop the stage, casting is almost everything in a presentation such as this.

Fortunately, Caroline Bowman has the pipes. It is hard to imagine a more intimidating feat for a stage singer-actress than to stand on a ledge in full costume and iconic blond hair bun while belting, "Don't cry for me, Argentina ..." That's a far cry from Bowman's role as '50s gum-chewing Rizzo in a touring revival of *Grease*.

The only Madonna here are the occasional references to the Virgin Mary.

Josh Young is equally formidable as the fictional Che, *Evita*'s sardonic narrator who cheers and eggs Peron on as she rises – too quickly for my tastes – from a 15-year-old peasant waif who sleeps her way into show business to the formally titled “Spiritual Leader of the Nation of Argentina.”

Along the way, Mrs. Peron gets reviled by the elite, the military and the powers of international diplomacy, but is adored by her legions of “shirtless” fans – even as her husband, President Juan Peron, is derided as a fascist.

Meanwhile, Che keeps the nicknamed Evita in her place, flailing – sometimes in a sort of surreal dream state – his Greek chorus of accusations, much as Judas Iscariot stuck it to Jesus in Rice-Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (a role for which Young, not coincidentally, won a Tony in his Broadway debut).

Some may quibble with *Evita*'s historical conjecture. But at least the revival tour now playing the Buell Theater has returned Che to his original everyman position as first written, dropping the conceit of a fictionalized Che Guevara, the true-life revolutionary who never met this production's chief protagonist.

Others may debate the sincerity of Mrs. Peron's charitable fundraising and the nature of Jesus's relationship with Mary Magdalene – but if either is sung well and staged creatively, everything's alright with me.

Evita plays the Buell Theater at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts through Jan. 26. Tickets start at \$25. Call 303-893-4100 or visit www.denvercenter.org. Tickets can also be purchased at the ticket office located in the Helen Bonfils Theater Complex lobby, Speer Boulevard and Arapahoe Street.

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