



Mixed Company: Characters from various period musical pieces share the stage, sometimes to disorienting effect, in this MPC Theatre Company roving production.

Silly Sorcery The Musical of Musicals (The Musical!) gets ambitious with mixed results.

By [Walter Ryce](#)

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MPC Theater's production of hodge-podge Broadway tribute/spoof *The Musical of Musicals (The Musical!)* is showing at The Bruce Ariss Wharf Theater, which is notable location for a couple of reasons.

The Fisherman's Wharf-based playhouse was one of the first locations where MPC Theatre Company founder Morgan Stock staged plays, prior to MPC building its own theater more than 40 years ago, so *The Musical* marks a decades-long return. And for many summers now, the Bruce Ariss has reprised its perennial musical revue, *Broadway: A Musical*, there, with all the trappings of an earnest, amateur show with more aspiring dreams on display than buffed polish.

Director Gary Bolen states in the program's letter: "*The Musical of Musicals (The Musical!)* pays homage to all of the musical theatre composers that I hold so dear." Created by Eric Rockwell and Joanne Bogart, it sources material from five major works: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*, the Lawrence/Edwin Lee/Herman musical *Mame*, Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Evita* and the Kander/Ebb/Fosse hit *Chicago*. But there are more references snuck in, including from *Cats* and *Sweeney Todd*.

Although *Broadway: A Musical* is safe for the whole family, *The Musical of Musicals (The Musical!)* is slyly risky adult stuff, dressed up in the goofy wardrobe of musical theater. The play opens on a Curly McLain-like character from *Oklahoma!* singing “Oh, What Beautiful Corn” instead of “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’.” He props his cowboy boot up on a bench where a farmgirl is provocatively churning butter.

“Good mornin’ Big Willy,” she says brightly. Later, Big Willy ponders, in song, about the prospect of playing with his son, little Willy, and his true love June popping the corn. Though that sequence is a little scattered, the play uses adult carnal knowledge through double entendres and innuendo to clever effect. But *The Musical* thankfully ranges from sex jokes, somewhat buried in wordplay, to the sophisticated end of the spectrum: A Che Guevara look-a-like sings to an Evita-y Junita, “You’re all washed up and sung-through.” And when *Phantom of the Opera*-based singer/muse Christine asks this “Phantom” if he wrote a particular musical, he asks her, “Do you know opera?”

“No,” she says.

“Yes, I wrote it myself.”

It’s a reference to allegations that Andrew Lloyd Webber lifted musical passages from opera composer Giacomo Puccini and Pink Floyd songwriter Roger Waters. That’s pretty steeped in musical theater, which can be a problem if you yourself aren’t. Satire and farce need everyone to know the source material that’s being played with if the humor is to make its mark.

The MPC Players, studded with new faces, look like they’re having fun. The singing voices range from brassy and distinct to somewhat muddled – a show with lyrics this clever deserves clarity all around. The keyboard playing and effects by accompanist Michael Blackburn are accomplished, the costumes are evocative and the choreography effective, but the plot is minimal and jumpy. The opening night audience sure appreciated the insider jokes. If you’re a fan of musicals, you probably will too.