

OFF BROADWAY

Not Your Grandma's Theatre

The View From Here

Theatre Review by [Matthew Murray](#)

Countless musicals paint New York City as the destination of choice for men, women, and children trying to find themselves and sort out a messy past to create a more ordered future. Much of the time, these people succeed. But in how many of these shows does it truly seem that someone searching for meaning in New York's limitless opportunities is spending his time looking for the wrong thing?

No, spinning wheels and wasted time aren't traditionally musical subjects. Yet, in *The View From Here*, playing as part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival, composer-librettist Timothy Huang and director Elizabeth Lucas manage to make them sing, even if they're not yet able to make the show soar.

The songs comprising the soundtrack of the life of the man chronicled here are not always easy to listen to. That's because the man (Shonn Wiley) is racked with uncertainty, and has fled to New York to unearth answers to questions that have crippled him professionally and personally. He hopes to sell the novel he's written, and when he arrives in his barren sixth-floor walk-up, he's filled with optimistic dreams about his ability to do that. But an undulating undercurrent in the music reminds us that things are never quite that easy.

It's not long before the city dissolves his prospects of surviving as a writer, enjoying the view from his apartment window, and of simply coping without his wife, Kelly, who he says is on tour and unable to join him in the city. He slowly begins to see his life and the city for what they really are, and not what he'd like them to be; as his manuscript is rejected multiple times, as he takes a survival job with a sadistic boss, and as he chafes against the limitations of the New York rat race, the true picture of his life becomes clearer and more frightening than he'd previously imagined.

That Huang and Lucas can render all of this musically, with only one real character and in less than 90 minutes, is an estimable accomplishment: Songs like the wistfully romantic "A Little Part of Every Day," the energetic and driving "Five Days" and "Unstoppable," and the exhaustedly resigned "How Do People Do This Every Day?" superbly define his ever-evolving character, and

are instrumental in surrounding you in the show's world, both a familiar depiction of New York and a singular realization of this man's unique experiences there.

But the show too often bogs down attempting to parlay the man's perspectives into a consciously theatrical, stream-of-consciousness style. His interactions with a street musician (Tim Byrnes), who "speaks" only through his trumpet, belong in a different show; the sound is smoke-steeped jazz not believable as a part of this man's life, and he's otherwise depicted as a loner with little human contact outside of wrong numbers on his voicemail. And an otherwise inventive song titled "Don't Ask Why" (subtitled "A Three Part Rant") strives so hard for ironic humor - and forces Wiley to play another character for the only time in the evening - that it too seems incongruous with its surroundings.

One also wishes that Huang and Lucas would be more direct in their storytelling: As is often the case with shows depending on secrets, answers are distributed in a fashion more arbitrary than well-considered, and a late-show plot development involving the man's father is best described as a *deus ex answering machina*. Huang and Lucas demonstrate elsewhere that they're much better than that.

So, for that matter, is their show, which is often so effortlessly moving and openhanded that you do feel as if you're being granted a forbidden peek into this man's psyche. The letters he writes to his wife are composed with such heartfelt sentiment and barely concealed pain that you learn more about their relationship from them than from all the other twists of plot - including the man's agonizingly revelatory internalization of his novel, "The Wanderer," in a searing but unsatisfying musical number - combined.

Wiley is predictably terrific as he dances through the show (which he also choreographed), first fleet of foot, then more leaden, and finally barely able to force himself to move to the music. His voice, which communicates conviction and panic with equal palpability, drips with ache for Kelly, for himself, and for the life he's letting slip away even as he tries to maintain his grasp on it. He does some impressive work as it is, and the role could grow into a signature tour de force for him.

It's not there yet, however. As the man searches for the missing pieces in his own personality, so does the show lack the overall structure, completeness, and polish that would make all of it as challenging, affecting, and emotional as it currently is at its best. Even with a fog currently set over the city, *The View From Here* is already grand.

New York Musical Theatre Festival
The View From Here
45th Street Theatre, 354 West 45th Street between 8th and 9th

Avenues

Running Time: 1 hour 15 minutes

Tuesday, Sep 27th @ 8:00 PM

Thursday, Sep 29th @ 4:30 PM

Friday, Sep 30th @ 11:00 PM

Sunday, Oct 2nd @ 1:00 PM

Tickets online: [Theatermania](#)

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