

Review: It's PROM Season at the Barn Playhouse

By: Paul Recupero

Ready your corsages and boutonnieres—to kick off its 91st season, the Barn Playhouse is putting on a prom. Specifically, the 2016 musical comedy *THE PROM*, which was adapted into a 2020 Netflix film. The Barn's production, directed by Steve DiNenno, is fun and lively, with a lot of laughs and a few touching moments.

Barry Glickman (Chris DiMeo) and Dee Dee Allen (Tara Feathers) are two Broadway legends whose narcissism has finally outpaced their talent, as disastrous reviews tank their latest musical flop on opening night. Their PR manager (Brendan Burns) urges them to clean up their perceived likeability. With the help of aspiring Broadway performers Trent and Angie (Kevin Arena and Sandy Lawler, respectively), they learn of a small Indiana high school embroiled in controversy after canceling its prom in lieu of allowing lesbian student Emma Nolan (Amanda Lamphere) to attend with her secret same-sex date. That date, we soon learn, is popular cheerleader Alyssa Greene (Amanda Romig), who's not yet "out."

Off to Indiana they go to right an injustice...and to boost their public image. Of course, upon their arrival, the stars' larger-than-life personas overshadow the cause that brought them there and do more harm than good. The show lampoons the out-of-touch celebrities' self-indulgent attempts to "do good." They make their grand entrance by literally bursting into a PTA meeting on the prom issue, complete with uproarious song and dance, to the horror of Emma, who they barely acknowledge. It's hilarious.

From there, the musical follows the celebs' various, mostly comic attempts to fix their blunders and win over the hostile students and PTA so Emma can get the prom she deserves. It's a tall order, as their only other ally is the school's principal (Tom Lamphere), who quickly becomes star-struck on Dee Dee.

THE PROM features a hearty number of laugh-out-loud bits and several upbeat songs. The Barn's cast of 25 performers go for broke, with infectious enthusiasm. Diane Hodgkiss's choreography is vibrant and well-performed, especially the group numbers that end the acts. Smaller numbers hit their marks too—Emma's sardonic intro and her sweet duet with Alyssa (beautifully harmonized by Lamphere and Romig) add emotional depth. On the flashier end, DiMeo's Barry and Feathers' Dee Dee bring charisma and comic flair to their solos.

The cast is uniformly strong. As the celebrities, DiMeo, Feathers, Arena, and Lawler carve out their individual eccentric roles while keeping group chemistry. They all have powerful voices and work the stage well to command attention to humorous effect. Lamphere's modest and introverted Emma provides a solid emotional anchor with moments of sincere connection, including a touching scene where Barry recounts to her his own prom-less youth.

THE PROM runs three hours (with an intermission), but its length is due to the show packing in so much. DiNenno's production moves briskly through the multiple locations and sets, with swift scene changes. Blocking is interestingly varied. Lighting, particularly during the ensemble dances, is effective. The orchestra conducted by Barbara Newberry (also the music director) sounds great and meshes well with the vocals.

I do have some frustrations with THE PROM in how the show executes its concept, which are not limited to the Barn's production. The musical introduces many characters, plots, and subplots in Act 1 and struggles to pay them all off in a satisfying way in Act 2. Of note, the students' pervasive homophobic bullying is diagnosed and fully cured within the span of a four-minute song. It's a fun number (animatedly led by Arena's Trent), but it's a bit too simplistic of a resolution.

Also, for a high school girl who wants to be defined by more than just her sexual orientation, the show tells us little else about Emma. There's mention of her living with her (unseen) grandma because her parents disowned her, but that's about it. Alyssa, the closeted half of the couple, gets a bit more background but also is underwritten. Her few interactions opposite her "mean girl" friends (snidely played by Jane Vitelli and Camryn Williams) and her overbearing PTA mom (Theresa Cinalli), who may know more than she lets on, are interesting bits not fully developed. And though we are told that Emma and Alyssa are in love, we learn surprisingly little about their relationship, which has been secretly going on for a year and a half (that's like seven in "teenager years").

This is no slight on the actors. To the contrary, Lamphere and Romig both give endearing performances, and they do an admirable job fleshing out engaging characters from what the script provides. Again, my few frustrations (which some will disagree with) are in the show itself. While it might seem unfair to note them in a review, these issues stand out more here precisely because the Barn's production does so well in amplifying the show's many great parts.

As a musical comedy with some meaningful touches, THE PROM is a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Of the three versions I've seen (the movie, a local professional run, and now this one), the Barn's is the most entertaining overall. The music and performances are stellar, and it's a powerful start to the season. DiNenno, Hodgkiss, Newberry, and the entire cast and crew have much to be proud of, and your attendance at this PROM is strongly encouraged.

If You Go...

THE PROM

Music by Matthew Skylar

Lyrics by Chad Beguelin

Book by Bob Martin and Chad Beguelin

Directed by Steve DiNenno

April 25–May 10, 2025

The Barn Playhouse

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