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| CRITIQUE OF *NUNSENSE*

Nunsense is a musical comedy that was created by Dan Goggin in 1985. The show originated as a line of impudent greeting cards, which spread quickly and became popular among the people. Because of their success, Goggin expanded them into a cabaret show and later a full-length musical performance.

Nunsense starts with the death of 52 nuns, who were poisoned by Sister Julia, the Child of God. Other residents of the convent survived and decided to earn some money for the funeral ceremonies. However, four nuns were not buried due to the lack of money, and their remaining sisters staged a variety show to raise funds.

Recently, I watched *Nunsense* directed by Michael Laun at the Pollock Stage at the Sacramento Theater Company, and the show amazed me very much. Form and content of this musical are seamlessly integrated in a prodigious, gripping, and contemporary show. I think that every element of the performance plays a meaningful and unique role in the creation of a general impression.



Primarily, the viewer pays attention to the scenery. It does not matter whether it includes a single chair or a luxurious room with expensive furniture, because the scenery always interprets the idea of a show. The decorations in *Nunsense*, which were created by Nila Coats, are neither dazzling nor splashy. As for me, it was logical to create such a scenery, because the show is already full of emotions, feelings, and movements. The decorations enhance a joyful and carefree atmosphere on the stage without distracting the viewers from the main characters. It is uncommon that the shows' decorations do not look like a church or monastery premises. It helps to create an offbeat mood and indicates that we are watching a comedy.

Another important component of any theatre product is a costume. Clothes provide emotional support to every actor. It becomes easier to bring characters to life. With the help of costumes, audience learns a lot about the place and historical period in which the show is set. Spectators also better understand the nature of the characters, their traits, and peculiarities.

There are five actors in *Nunsense*, which are dressed as nuns. They all have long and loose tunics made of black fabric and white coifs with a wimple to cover the cheeks and neck. The clothes do not differ from the usual nuns' habit, so the characters look very realistic. On the contrary, their behavior is completely unusual and ridiculous. This contrast makes the show comedian by breaking the stereotypes about nuns' life. During the performance, the characters use a lot of other costume elements. For example, they wear chef hats while reading a recipe book, which looks ludicrous, because the characters wear other clothes without removing

their nuns' habits.

The next influential element that gives a carnivalesque unity to the performance is lighting. Light is the most effective way to set the mood of a scene. Originally, it was used to make a stage picture visible, but now lighting designers use a lot of different techniques to affect the show.

The lighting designer in *Nunsense* is Jordan Burkholder. He uses direct and indirect lights to illuminate the nuns and the stage. The direct lights draw the audience's attention to a particular subject. For instance, this method is used when Sister Robert Anne sings "To Be a Star". The woman stands on the illuminated part of the scene, while other elements are dark; thereby, the spectators do not pay attention to them. The indirect light illuminates the whole scene without focusing on a particular site. Burkholder uses this kind of lighting almost for all moments when the nuns speak to each other.

Generally, the show's strength is in its music and sounds. The addition of music to the performance reinforces the emotions and evokes a specific atmosphere that words cannot create alone. Musicals are closely related to opera, but not all their dialogues are accompanied. Using opera singing creates dramatic situations in the show. For example, *Nunsense* contains a lot of exposition songs such as "Nunsense is Habit-Forming", "A Difficult Transition", and "The Movie". They use a dialogue between the characters to bring some dynamism to the story.

At the same time, there are many other sounds in the show. Some of them build transitions between scenes, others motivate actions and give



information about the characters. All of them were created by musical director Samuel Klein. As for me, he perfectly did his work, because sound and music effects are well combined with the plot.

The story and emotions in the show are communicated not only through words, songs, and costumes. *Nunsense*, like any other musical, includes some dance elements. For example, one of the characters, Sister Mary Leo, is the first ballerina nun in the world, and she dances really well. Despite this, her performance looks comical and illogical, because the woman wears a nuns' habit.

In conclusion, every musical, including *Nunsense*, is a combination of many design elements such as scenery, costume, sounds, and lighting. Each of them has a different effect on the show together creating a stylish and unsurpassed masterpiece. Without a doubt, we should pay attention to the work of the directors of this musical comedy. With their help, the design elements effectively influence the mood, characters, and environment of *Nunsense*. They also create an enjoyable atmosphere on the stage and in the hall bringing pleasure and delight to the audience.

