

suitable for some Eli debating society. It's a drama about two people who want something: Janine wants to keep what she has, while Zoe has specific goals in each act that drive her behavior.

By the start of the Act Two, life-changing decisions are at stake.

At one point, Janine accuses Zoe of a lack of empathy, but that's a finger that points both way here. Zoe has the moral high ground in calling out this professor of early American history for minimiz-



Kate Levy and Kimber Sprawl perform in "The Niceties."

dent also seems unwilling to learn much from the personal life experience of her teacher.

Because "The Niceties" raises many issues that merit further discussion, the Rep has scheduled several post-show panel discussions with community experts. Get the dates and details at milwaukeeerep.com.

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REVIEW

Skylight's 'Oklahoma!' full of heart

Elaine Schmidt

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USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

The Skylight Music Theatre production of "Oklahoma!" that opened Friday at Broadway Theatre Center hit all the right notes, literally and figuratively.

This show, directed by Jill Anna Ponasik, is tightly executed, with a cast of 12 and four-person costumed orchestra sharing the stage. Within those parameters, which are significantly scaled back from a typical production, Ponasik's vision of the show goes straight to its dramatic/musical heart, putting its significant dialog and wonderful Rodgers and Hammerstein songs and score at center stage.

Dance numbers are small and tightly executed, chorus numbers too are clean, and delivered with a warmth and intimacy that would be lost with a bigger ensemble.

Lucas Pastrana, who created a warm-hearted, sweet-natured Curly and sang the role with polish and finesse, was beautifully matched by Brittani Moore's sweet young thing/woman of substance portrayal of Laurey Williams, and her sparkling vocal delivery.

Cynthia Cobb found the perfect balance of a big heart, a sharp tongue and a spine of steel in her spot-on portrayal of Aunt Eller.

Hannah Esch's Ado Annie was completely lovable. She was loud, brash, easily distracted by any man who looked her way, and an absolute delight. She was well by Sean Anthony Jackson's not-so-bright, guileless Will Parker, who was also a delight in the role.

Jeremy Peter Johnson won a few



The Skylight Music Theatre cast performs "Oklahoma!" at the Broadway Theatre Center. MARK FROHNA

IF YOU GO

Skylight Music Theatre performs "Oklahoma!" runs through Oct. 13 in the Broadway Theatre Center, 158 North Broadway. Visit www.skylightmusictheatre.org or call (414) 291-7800.

boos, and yes, "won" is the appropriate word, amid enthusiastic applause for his heartbreakingly dark, angry portrayal of the disturbing Jud Fry, creating a believable bundle of human frailties.

Ethan D. Brittingham played the often completely overdone role of Ali Hakim with a soft-spoken, comic subtly

that drew the audience to his character.

Emanuel Camacho (Cord Elam), Chad Larget (Andrew Carnes), Stephanie Stazsak (Slim), and Christal Wagner (Gertie Cummings) brought energy and polish to their roles and to the show's various musical and dance numbers.

Peter Dean Beck's simple, single set, captured the hardscrabble, homespun nature of life in the Oklahoma Territory, while Karin Simonson Kopischke's unfussy, period-appropriate costumes helped define characters.

Although the on-stage, in-costume orchestra folds neatly into the cast and action, its balance of sound does not. The two string instruments are largely lost in the sonic shuffle for most of the show.