

► Review

'Ordinary Days' no ordinary play in Cuba

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CUBA — It may be instructive to begin a review of Olean Community Theatre's production of "Ordinary Days," set in New York City in 2005, with a lesson in semantics. The word "ordinary" implies something normal, even mundane. This production certainly does not fit that pattern.

There are many elements in the production that might be better termed "out of the ordinary" — things that are different from the norm. For example, the play is a musical with only four cast members, a small number for a musical production, and most of the lines of the play are delivered in song.

In addition, the "band" accompanying the singers consists of a single talented individual (Marcia Wymer) playing a keyboard.

Also out of the ordinary is the set, which is not on the stage at the Palmer Opera House in Cuba. Rather, it consists of a group of risers, cubes, benches and construction scaffolding in one well-lit corner of the large upstairs room.

There are even more ways in which the production might be deemed "extraordinary," which means something far superior to the norm. The four actors are the most obvious place to start.

There are two couples. Jason (Tim Hollamby) and Claire (Kyle Leslie) have just moved in together, and this causes a great deal of anxiety on both their parts. The tension is expressed individually in their first songs, his "The Space Between" and her "Let Things Go."

The other couple does not meet until nearly half-way through the play. Deb (Madison McClelland) is a disgruntled student ("Don't Wanna Be Here"), who has recently lost her notebook full of the information she needs to complete her the-

sis for graduation. Warren (Skyler Schapp) is a rootless kid with artistic ambitions who just happens to find Deb's notebook. He thinks their meeting might be a "Sort-Of Fairy Tale," but she isn't so sure when she finds he has no conception of the "Big Picture."

The acting is extraordinary throughout. With minimal dialogue, the actors have to express their feelings and emotions through nuance and gesture in their songs, and they all succeed. Mr. Hollamby's great voice and range overcome the fact that his character is written as a rather one-dimensional, anxious bore. Miss Leslie is perfect as the pretty cosmopolitan New Yorker — she gets to make the neat costume changes. She is most expressive in song, particularly in the pathos she shows in her last number, "I'll Be Here."

Mr. Schapp is a confident singer who really shines in the "Rooftop Duet" and in his explanation of a painting at the end of the show ("Beautiful"). Miss McClelland has the strongest comedic lyrics of any of the actors, and she makes the most of them. Her rapid-fire delivery of lyrics in several numbers is fantastic, especially in her tour-de-force, "Calm."

The ability to express a great range of emotions in song is a tribute not only to the actors, but also to the extraordinary abilities of two OCT veterans — director Paul Nelson and musical director Eric VanDruff. They are abetted in the production by producer Linda Manross and technical directors Ken and Charlotte Roberts, who are responsible for the sound and lighting effects.

"Ordinary Days" opened Friday at the Palmer Opera House. Matinees will be performed at 2 p.m. today and Sunday, and an evening performance is set for 7:30 p.m. today. The performances will take place on the building's second floor, which is accessible by an elevator.