

# Warren Gerds/Critic at Large: Review: 'Candide' an exotic rush in Sturgeon Bay *Third Avenue Playhouse*

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*Candide* is a burst of high-level mischief from brilliant minds, past and present....

This production is another of Third Avenue Playhouse's treats that you'd have to travel far distances from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, to find such a gem.

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Imagination oozes all over this thing. Ingenious director James Valcq has his dynamic pro players leaping from character to character.

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The saga of *Candide* is akin to an exotic dish, one with spicy surprises. Sensuality is afoot, along with sardonic, nasty and poke-in-the-eye touches. There is plenty of playfulness, too, as this tongue-in-cheek line: "Suddenly, Candide rushes in, having heard an e-flat he knows just as well as his own." (The line especially works because the singing of Gamaché and Penick is terrific).

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The singing is knock-out wonderful across a spectrum of possibilities. In one piece, Candide (Penick) and Cunegonde (Gamaché) sing of their future together – and the imagined happiness of each is different than the other's. Another piece is astounding in Cunegonde's duplicity – a “suffering” soul in one moment who is exhilarates in bedecking herself in jewelry in the next, with Gamaché in her element in grand and grandiose voice/characterization. Another piece finds The Old Woman (Becky Spice) and Cunegonde (Gamaché) ripping off huge, colorful chords. Arming the singers in all this is the music of the fecund Leonard Bernstein.

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Colorful characters pop up at every turn in a multiplicity offered by Drew Brhel, Doug Clemons, Anna Cline, Matt Frye and Kelsey Wang. A few favorites: Clemons as the Archbishop, who carefully finds the most comfortable place to die; Brhel as Dr. Pangloss, whose pedantry carries through to a discussion the rope and noose that are about to be used on him; and Frye as Vanderdendur, whose ship comes in at the expense of the gullible Candide.

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The production has an aura of eagerness among the performers. It's like, “Have we got this wild tale to tell, and we can hardly wait to tell it and sing it.”