

# BUCKS COUNTY HERALD

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## “The New World” should be Broadway bound



*Justin Guarini and Jillian Gottlieb star in “The New World” at Bucks County Playhouse through Dec. 2.*

By Jean Brenner

Mark my words: “The New World” musical is headed to Broadway!

It is special. It is funny. It is delightfully entertaining. A stretch of the typical theatrical newbie, it is humorous, witty, and is filled with wisdom – especially the advice that we need to accept one another, regardless of our differences, regardless of the color of our skin, regardless of our religious beliefs.

During the performance, I kept thinking, “This show has a message so much like the one in ‘South Pacific’; it simply gets to the same conclusion by very different means.”

The writers have broken so many theatrical rules in "The New World," which opened in spectacular fashion last week at Bucks County Playhouse, and in doing so, the audience is thoroughly surprised and delightfully entertained. For example, we are invited to believe there is a talking turkey on stage, and we do so because Tyler Maynard believes he is, in fact, charming "Carl the talking turkey." He also is involved in a surprise twist near the show's conclusion.

We are expected to accept that Pilgrims landed in the new world and were not met by savages, but by accepting Indian tribes who treated them rather kindly until the Pilgrims tried to change the Native Americans who are anything but what you might expect.

Most of them wear current clothing (the female chief wears a pantsuit) some are attired in cocktail outfits. A few others are scantily clad. Forget about all the pictures you saw of Pilgrims and Indians in your early American history books; they are out the window in this musical.

There is a primary primal love story and a humorous secondary one. The first is between the two leads, Susanna Standish, daughter of the Pilgrim leader, played delightfully by Jillian Gottlieb (think Kirsten Chenoweth) and Santuit, son of Chief Massasoit, played charmingly by Justin Guarini.

Santuit is promised by the chief, his mother, to be married to a woman from a nearby tribe, but he does not love that woman and hides in his man cave with his turkey buddy, Carl.

Susanna, on the other hand, has been raised to be a prim and proper Pilgrim, but falls quickly for the not-so-heathen tribesman. She sees beyond his brownish skin and he accepts her "whiteness." It is the parents who have problems with racial mingling at first, but even they come around after a while and are shown by their children the way of acceptance.

Throughout the musical, there are such delightful song and dance numbers such as "Harmony," "Wigwam," "Massachusetts," "Look on the Bright Side," "Indian Summer," "Other People," and "Mix It Up." The cast was having fun singing these songs; the audience was caught up in the silliness happening on stage.

One matter uppermost in everyone's mind as the show opened Saturday night: the leading man, Julius Thomas III, who had spent three weeks rehearsing, injured himself a week ago, and Justin Guarini was called upon to step in to play the male lead with only two rehearsals.

By Saturday night or earlier, Guarini was totally off book for the dialogue, and knew all of the songs. No one would have known he had only one week in rehearsal including preview performances.

He and Jillian Gottlieb were wonderful in their roles; the chemistry they exuded was palpable. We could barely wait for the anticipated embrace and kiss. A cliché love story was clinched.

But, there are so many other fine performers in this cast: Ann Harada plays a very in-charge strong Chief Massasoit. Her voice is strong and clear. She is short in stature but huge in style. Eddie Cooper as Miles

Standish also gives an outstanding performance. Cooper is a big guy with a huge voice to match. Hearing him sing is pure pleasure.

The chief's second son is Tago, who comes into his own and out from the shadow of his brother Santuit. He learns to take charge, and he, too, finds love with an unlikely woman, Patience's Aunt Joan, sister to Miles Standish. As Tago, Clyde Alves is very funny as he dances, sings, mugs and talks with a New York accent.

He falls quickly for the older woman and matures very quickly.

Aunt Joan Standish is played by Jennifer Perry, currently on Broadway in "Kinky Boots." Perry has super comedic timing and is so very entertaining in her various songs.

One cast member of prime interest to Philadelphians is Ginna Le Vine, playing "Creamy Corn" the jilted love interest of Santuit. Le Vine is the grandniece of Grace Kelly, following in her aunt's footsteps as Kelly started her career at the Playhouse.

Most musicals have only a few major roles. This musical has eight within 17 cast members. That is a large cast to have in a Broadway musical. It also is one reason "The New World" works so well.

The book was written by L.F. Turner, who for years was a stand-up comedian and worked for Saturday Night Live. Regina DeCicco, the other book writer, has worked in TV and theater and sits on the board for a Diverse America. They must have had great fun writing this and sadness about having to cut some of their clever lines.

Gary Adler, composer, has been a theater musician for over 25 years. He wrote both music and lyrics for "Altar Boyz." Phoebe Kreutz is writer of the lyrics. The Music Director is Paul Masse, conducting his balcony band.

Stafford Arima is the director, and creative Lorin Latarro is back at BCP as choreographer. The attention the two directors gave to every detail of "The New World" is clear.

"The New World" plays now through Dec. 2. Get your ticket soon. Contact Bucks County Playhouse, 70 S. Main St., New Hope, at 215-862-2121 or visit [bcptheater.org](http://bcptheater.org).