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## BWW Review: 42ND STREET at Bucks County Playhouse - Tessa Grady Hoofs Her Way to Your Heart



"Lullabye of Broadway"- Photo by Mark Garvin

*42nd Street* is a sweet Broadway classic that truly makes its mark with every tap number. As indicated in the curtain speech, *42nd Street* is the "largest" production that BCP has produced since it reopened 5 years ago. Now, I am not sure what they meant by large as this production was significantly scaled down. Not to indicate it was poor, it just wasn't big or flashy in a way you would expect a musical of that historic caliber.

*42nd Street* is the story (based on the novel by [Bradford Ropes](#)) of ambitious Peggy Sawyer making her first attempt at a Big Apple theatre life having just moved from Allentown, PA. She lands her first gig as a chorus girl all the while stealing the hearts of those around her with her skill and charm. Leading Lady, Dorothy Brock, breaks her ankle just before opening night and it's Peggy who is pegged to stand in and take over the role.

Often, productions of *42nd Street* focus on the headliners playing Dorothy Brock. In this production, the role is played by Broadway's [Linda Balgord](#). Balgord's performance didn't quite hit the mark. Although the character of Brock is a distinguished diva, Balgord's portrayal left her shrewd and too mature for the role. There was very little chemistry with her only screen love Pat Denning, played charmingly by [Patrick Oliver Jones](#). Balgord kept Brock on the same note throughout, much like an [Agnes Nixon](#) soap opera.



"Go Into Your Dance" featuring Tessa Grady as Peggy Sawyer. Photo by Mark Garvin.

On the flip side, the role of Peggy Sawyer is often glossed over. Pushed aside as an ingenue who can tap. This is the first time seeing a production of *42nd Street* where Peggy is truly the star and it's all due to triple threat actor [Tessa Grady](#). I couldn't help but feel like Grady was channeling [Sutton Foster](#) from *Thoroughly Modern Millie* the entire time. Perhaps director [Hunter Foster](#) thought the same thing as Sutton is his sister. Like Foster, Grady brought innocence, charm, and grit to Sawyer. You watched her unpeel the onion layer by layer with each curveball thrown her way. On top of being an impeccable hooper!

[Hunter Foster](#) took a large-scale musical and trimmed it down to enhance the story-line. You can really sink your teeth into the characters plights. Most notably of Julian Marsh as played by [Matt Walton](#). There was an underlying story that never came through before until Walton's portrayal. A sickly man so determined to have one final Broadway hit. Although some tender moments were pushed through, there was heart. Something that is often missed on the big Broadway stage and surrounded by over the top spectacle.

Some lovely standouts from [Matt Bauman](#) as Andy Lee, [Blakely Slaybaugh](#) as Billy Sawyer, [Ruth Gottschall](#) as Maggie Jones, and [Kilty Reidy](#) as Bert Barry. All provided the comedy chops of a feel-good musical as well as the vocal prowess of a classic. The ensemble was effective, I would have wished for double the size for that "large" musical vibe. There is nothing like a ton of tappers on stage at once! The set as designed by [Anna Louizos](#) was scaled down and effective, yet the costumes as designed by [Nicole V. Moody](#) fell flat. The colors and patterns did not have a cohesiveness and some ensemble members stood out for the wrong reasons. Most of Brock's costumes as well as several ensemble members, although period, were unflattering and ill-fitted. Adding to the lackluster were wigs designed by [J. Jared Janas](#) that were simply distracting. Particularly the wigs worn by Grady's Peggy Sawyer. [Bucks County Playhouse](#) is an intimate space; therefore, the costume and wigs options are less forgiving than in a big Broadway house. Particularly in musical number, "We're in the Money."

The music by [Harry Warren](#), lyrics by [Al Dubin](#), and book by [Michael Stewart](#) & [Mark Bramble](#), truly encapsulate a timeless Broadway classic. However, most classics are under watchful eye in this #metoo world. Thankfully, this production's female empowerment shines through with great aplomb. With Tessa Grady leading the Great White Way, she along with the title number "42nd Street" are worth the price of admission. The highlight was that SHE got the final bow, as it should be. The standing ovation at yesterday's matinee was single handedly for her.

[Bucks County Playhouse](#) is in the heart of historic New Hope, PA a mere 30 miles from Philadelphia. You can plan an entire day full of festivities or simply ride in just for a show. I would suggest plenty of time to find parking as well as about \$20 bucks to cover it. Seating is comfortable but very compact, so plan accordingly.