



**Times of Trenton Entertainment**



Ruth Gottschall, Matt Bauman, Tessa Grady, Brianna Marie Latrash, Monette McKay and Daisy Wright appearing in "42nd Street" at New Hope's Bucks County Playhouse.(Courtesy Photo)

By Ted Otten

For The Times of Trenton

The words ring out in Depression era Broadway, the scene of "42nd Street," the musical now onstage at New Hope's Bucks County Playhouse through August 4, and get passed on to every unemployed performer who owns tap shoes, "Julian Marsh is doing a show!"

"42nd Street" started out as a 1932 novel by Bradford Ropes, became a blockbuster screen musical with six songs by Harry Warren and Al Dubin and direction by Lloyd Bacon plus spectacular choreography by Busby Berkeley in 1933. Almost five decades later, it became one of Broadway's longest running

musicals and the 1981 Tony Award winner as best musical with eighteen songs by Dubin and Warren, direction and choreography by Gower Champion and a new script by Michael Stewart and Mark Bramble. Its 1984 London production won the Olivier Award as best musical, and its 2017 London revival at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, where its first production played, is running now and features Lulu as Dorothy Brock.

The story is any stage-struck hopeful's dream come true. Famed director Julian Marsh (played by Matt Walton) is putting on a new musical called "Pretty Lady," and fading star Dorothy Brock (Linda Balgord) is asked to audition for the lead. Peggy Sawyer (Tessa Grady), newly arrived from Allentown, PA, has missed the chorus audition but she falls under the philandering eye of Billy Lawlor (Blakely Slaybaugh), the juvenile lead, and gets to be seen by Marsh who accepts her into the chorus which already includes Phyllis (Daisy Wright), Lorraine (Brianna Latrash) and Anytime Annie (Monette McKay). But out of town tryouts don't go well, Brock breaks her ankle, and the show might close. Marsh sees star potential in Peggy and asks her, with only two days to learn the star's role, to "come on along and listen to the lullaby of Broadway!" Will Peggy accept the challenge and save the show?

Matt Walton, who grew up in New Jersey and is already familiar with Bucks County Playhouse and the New Hope area, is delighted to be playing Julian Marsh, a character who didn't sing in the 1933 film version but is entrusted with songs like "Lullaby of Broadway" and the title song in the stage musical. Walton has never seen the film or the show although he has heard, because he likes Jerry Orbach who played Marsh in the 1981 Broadway cast, the best-selling original cast recording. Several of his classmates from the Boston Conservatory of Music were in the show's 2001 Broadway revival which played over 1500 performances.

"I'm a big fan of dancers although I'm not so good at it myself," said Walton, "and I'm grateful that Jeremy Dumont, our choreographer, didn't give me that much dancing to do. But everyone else in this cast does and is terrific. Every one of the big numbers is so special," said Walton who thinks Marsh is an outstanding example of the kind of male dominance that ruled so much of our society in the past.

"We don't want the audience to cringe at the way things used to be, but this show is set firmly in an age that's now past, so the show is difficult to stage in the age of 'Me Too' and still honor the truth of the way things were," said Walton.

"Julian is creative and desperate and probably a little bit crazy. Some of us feel that the sand castles we build are essential to a functioning culture, and we get the feeling that we're irreplaceable, and Marsh is one of those people. Things change; there's progress and difference, but Julian is only seeing things the way things used to be when the director was God. Marsh has lost the fortune he had made in the past in the 1929 stock market crash. That's what the Depression did to him, and this show is going to put him back on top. To make that happen, he also has to keep the guy with the purse strings happy, make sure that the show is perfection and that the critics will give him reviews that sell tickets. He has a line, 'I need this show more than you do,' that reveals his desperation. This isn't just a job to him; it's his future.

"He has to be played with fervor born out of that desperation. He isn't young any more, and never before has so much been riding on his shoulders. He has this really revealing monologue in which he asks Peggy to think about all the people she'll put out of work, all the songs that will go unsung, all the scenery that will go unseen and the costumes unworn. He tells Peggy that the most glorious words in the English language are 'musical comedy,' and that even if she hates him for pushing her so hard, she's

doing something that must be done for the continuation of the art that is theatre," said Dalton whose favorite role so far has been Berger in "Hair."

Tessa Grady has played Peggy Sawyer in other productions, the first when she was 17 years old. Now, at the old age of 24, she feels ready to present that kind of prepared determination that will be needed for Peggy to deserve her place in the spotlight.

"I grew up watching the film and enjoying all those songs sung by Ruby Keeler and Dick Powell, but there are so many more of them here than in that film," said Grady whose favorite role so far has been the title role in "Thoroughly Modern Millie" and whose bucket list includes Louise in "Gypsy" and the title role in "Sweet Charity."

"My favorite song is 'About a Quarter to Nine' which Peggy sings with Dorothy in the second act. It's such a simple moment in the show with the feeling of giving and caring to another human," said Grady, "so different from the others in a show full of production numbers. Of the songs I don't sing, the one I like best is 'I Only Have Eyes for You' which is a duet for Dorothy and Billy in the first act which was in the film and which I have always loved."

Grady explained that Peggy gets blamed for Dorothy's accident, gets fired on Dorothy's insistence, and is almost ready to get on a bus back to Allentown, but Marsh's stirring monologue strikes a responsive chord within her.

"Sometimes, Peggy is played as an innocent, but in the approach of Hunter Foster, our director, Peggy is inexperienced, yes, and young, but she has come to the city with guts and puts herself out there and doesn't have a fear of failure really. She represents fierce women."

## **IF YOU GO**

### **"42nd Street"**

**Where:** Bucks County Playhouse, 70 South Main Street, New Hope, PA

**When:** through August 4, Tuesday & Thursday at 7:30, Friday & Saturday at 8 p.m.; matinees Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday & Sunday at 2 p.m.

**How much:** Tickets are \$40 to \$80; group rates for 10 or more

**Contact:** (215) 862 - 2121 or at [buckscountyplayhouse.org](http://buckscountyplayhouse.org).