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C'est Magnifique

by Amy Krivohlavek

The *Fartiste* reviewed August 11, 2006

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...lence has never been quite so variegated—or dignified—as in the days of Joseph Pujol. In *The Fartiste*, an entertaining yet bizarre new musical, Michael Roberts (music and lyrics) and Charlie Schulman (book) tell the true story of a simple baker who became a Moulin Rouge star thanks to the dexterity of his posterior. John Gould Rubin's efficient, colorful direction brings the debauchery of 1890's Paris vividly to life while giving us reason to sympathize with Pujol, a man who wants his farting to mean much more than, well, the passing of gas.

Surrounded by a mélange of artists and cancan dancers, Pujol (Kevin Kraft) is the earnest straight man, quite determined to turn his odd talent into a respected art form. In a self-possessed and winning performance, Kraft barely cracks a smile as he contorts his body to summon an extraordinary array of sounds, including explosive trumpeting and high-pitched squeaks. This combination of highbrow attitude with lowbrow physicality makes the show hilarious and endearing.

As played by the jaunty band, Roberts's bistro-infused songs are pleasant and straightforward. In a silky duet, "Listen With Your Eyes Closed," Pujol begs his wife Elizabeth (Rebecca Kupka) to see his talent as more than grotesque flatulence. Toulouse-Lautrec (played on bended knee by Mark Baker) and the narrator, Aristide Bruant (the superb Nick Wyman), charm in "We Live for Art," a celebration of decadent pleasures. And Jim Corti, as producer Charles Zidler, scores with "Give 'Em What They Want," a perky vaudevillian number intended to convince Pujol to give up his ideals and fart for the masses.

With a simple, shimmering red curtain, a handful of lacy black garments, and a cluster of red chairs, designers Clint Ramos (set) and Melinda C. Basaca (costumes) capture the seedy atmosphere of Montmartre more resourcefully than Schulman and Roberts' interminable opening sequences. Richard Move provides expert choreography for the high-energy dances.

With incredible flair, rubber-mouthed sound effects man Steven Scott stands at a microphone at the edge of the stage, voicing Pujol's expulsions with perfect timing. "Make your body bleat," commands Zidler, but Pujol, determined to compose his own symphony, wants his body to make music, not ribald reverberations. His audience, however, demands sensational noise, not sensitive arpeggios. Thus, although raunchy double entendre invariably abounds, *The Fartiste* also

THE FARTISTE

Henry Street Settlement

Category: Musical
Written by: Book by Charlie Schulman, Music and lyrics by Michael Roberts
Directed by: John Gould Rubin
Produced by: resented by Wet Knee Productions, Loose Canon Productions, and DRD Productions in Association with The Drama Center,
Opens: August 11, 2006
Closes: August 20, 2006
Running Time: 90 minutes

Theater: Henry Street Settlement
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 New York, NY 10002
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Written by: Charles Schulman (book), Michael Roberts (music & lyrics)
Directed by: John Gould Rubin
Produced by: Wet Knee Productions, Loose Cannon Productions, and DRD Productions in Association with Diane Procter and The Drama Center
Lighting Design: Nicole Pearce
Sound Design: Elizabeth Rhodes
Set Design: Clint Ramos
Costume Design: Melinda C. Basaca
Choreographer: Richard Move
Music Direction, Arrangements, Orchestrations: John Baxindine

Cast

Mark Baker as Toulouse Lautrec
 Jim Corti as Charles Zidler
 Molly Curry as Can-Can Girl
 Tom Gamblin as Doctor/Erik Satie
 Rachel Kopf as Can-Can Girl
 Kevin Kraft as Joseph Pujol
 Rebecca Kupka as Elizabeth Pujol
 Lindsay K. Northen as Can-Can Girl/Little Marie
 Lyn Philistine as La Goulue
 Steven Scott as Vocal Effect/STE/Ensemble
 Charly Seamon as Can-Can Girl
 Nick Wyman as Aristide Bruant

The Orchestra:
Conductor/Piano: John Baxindine
Flute/Clarinet/Bassoon: Edward Renz
Trumpet/Flugelhorn: Jason Wiseman
Cello: Allison Seidner
Bass: Sean Baker
Percussion: Howie Gordon

Crew

Production Stage Manager: Elizabeth

Paige
Casting: Stephanie
Klapper
Original Concert
Performance Casting:
Shane/Goldstein Casting
Press Agent: Springer
Associates PR/Joe
Trentacosta
General Manager:
Cheryl Dennis