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'World' revolves around talented cast

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Special to the Herald

"The World Goes 'Round" is an astonishing combination of songs, cast and direction.

There are 30 wonderful songs by John Kander and Frank Ebb, an incredible cast of five singer/dancers of awesome versatility, brilliant direction and choreography by Dennis Courtney and a stunning set by Michael Lasswell that is a model of taste and ingenuity.

You will be left breathless by the cornucopia of talent that comes cascading off the stage of the Florida Studio Theatre, where it should run forever. You will be swept up into a musical theater paradise.

First, the Kander-Ebb songs are an amazing combination of wit, warmth and melodic invention - full of delightfully antic ideas and surprising depth. Strung together by Scott Ellis, Susan Stroman and David Thompson, they form a body of work that lifts the spirit.

With highlights from "Cabaret," "Chicago," "Zorba," "The Happy Time," "Woman of the Year," "The Rink" and "Kiss of the Spider Woman," among others, each song becomes a perfect, three-act miniature in Courtney's richly evocative staging.

The stage is alive with some of the best voices you will hear on any platform. Gayle Samuels opens the show with a spectacularly sung "And the World Goes 'Round." "The Happy Time" is nicely realized in Christopher Vettel's simple, lovely rendition. Forrest Richards makes something magical out of "Colored Lights," in addition to singing it beautifully. Kilty Reidy has fun with "Sara Lee" and brings his bright tenor and touching vulnerability to "Mr. Cellophane." Elizabeth Van Duyne sizzles in "Arthur in the Afternoon," while doing some stylish choreography with boy-toy Vettel.

One of the most moving moments occurs by combining two beautiful ballads - Vettel's "I Don't Remember You" and Reidy's "Sometimes a Day Goes By" - and, in the combination, achieving an even richer resonance.

Samuels and Richards have two knockout duets - the raucous "Class" in their deliciously outrageous wigs and "The Grass Is Always Greener," where they collaborate to hysterical results.

In vocal arrangements that are subtle and complex, the Fab Five do exemplary work: the close harmony singing in "Cabaret"; the intricate two against three arrangement of "All That Jazz," buoyantly led by Van Duyne and Reidy; the sassy showbiz strutting in "Me and My Baby," with its tambourines and baby faces; and the Act II opener, the dazzling "Ring Them Bells," with Richards strutting her comic stuff to striking effect.

Indeed, the company is an embarrassment of riches: the brilliantly staged and performed "Coffee"; the exhilarating "The Rink," with everyone on roller skates; the rich rewards of combining "Only Love" (Samuels); "Marry Me" (Reidy) and "A Quiet Thing" (Van Duyne), evolving into "When It All Comes True" for Reidy and Van Duyne, which erupts into a fabulous pas de deux; and the cleverly staged "Money, Money" with it's echoes of the Brecht-Weill "Threepenny Opera."

Striking solo moments abounded: In a surprising turn to a more operatic sound, Vettel sang an exciting "Kiss of the Spider Woman," with its dynamic lighting; Richards took "How Lucky Can You Get" to places you'd never expect, discovering unique levels of joy and pain; Samuels put her own stunning stamp on Streisand's "My Coloring Book"; and the powerful combination of Vettel's "We Can Make It," Samuels' "Maybe This Time" and Richards' "Isn't This Better" gave added depth and meaning to all three.

Michael Lasswell's set started with a giant blow-up of the Hirschfeld caricature of Kander and Ebb, which parted to reveal the New York skyline that transformed into many magical looks. Jeffrey Dillon's lighting was imaginative. Marcella Beckwith's costumes were models of taste and ingenuity, especially the bell jackets for "Ring Them Bells.". Much of the musical riches of the evening came from Michael Sebastian, whose musical direction kept the standards high.

It was one of the most exhilarating evenings in memory. Go, and revel in the glories of Kander and Ebb and this magnificent company.

IF YOU GO

- **WHAT:** "The World Goes 'Round"
- **WHERE:** Florida Studio Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave, Sarasota
- **WHEN:** 8 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday, 2 p.m. Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday, through Nov. 29
- **TICKETS:** \$28-\$30
- **BOX OFFICE:** 366-9000

Jack Eddleman has appeared in eight Broadway musicals and directed nine productions for the New York City Opera Company at Lincoln Center.

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