

THEATER REVIEW | 'THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD'

This Isn't Kansas: It's a Quinceañera That Sets the Scene



Jeremy Daniel

The Yellow Brick Road From left: Ryan Duncan, Virginia Cavaliere, Cedric Leiba Jr. and Frank Viveros in this musical at Lucille Lortel.

By ERIC GRODE

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This isn't your grandparents' "Wizard of Oz." Or your parents' "Wiz." Or your older sister's "Wicked."

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Jeremy Daniel

From left, Virginia Cavaliere, Ryan Duncan and Natalie Toroas La Bruja in "The Yellow Brick Road."

"The Yellow Brick Road," the 2011 entry in TheaterWorks USA's dependably diverting free summer series for young audiences, is a high-spirited mix of all these shows, particularly "The Wiz." The director, Devanand Janki, has packed more than a dozen songs and several winning performances into this Latino-flavored riff on the L. Frank Baum classic at the Lucille Lortel Theater. No time to click heels in this 65-minute telling: these shoes are made for dancing.

With its accessible melodies and robust harmonies, the score by Jaime Lozano and Tommy Newman earns comparisons to Stephen Flaherty's music for "[Once on This Island](#)," although with salsa and merengue instead of calypso rhythms. Nearly half the songs are at least partly bilingual, and while the lyrics (those that are intelligible through the sludgy sound design) don't always land, the toe tappers far outnumber the watch checkers.

Given the amount of music, Mando Alvarado and Mr. Newman pack the familiar tale about Dorothy (Dora, as she's known here, is whisked off to Oz right before her [quinceañera](#)) into an extremely tight book. Unlike the Shreks and the Kung Fu Pandas of this world, the characters mostly aim their material at the younger audience's level, although it is a bit jarring to hear Dora (the Nickelodeon-ready Virginia Cavaliere) quote "Scarface," one of the most violent [movies](#) ever made.

Among the hard-working supporting players, Cedric Leiba Jr. is a crowd favorite as a pint-size lion, and Natalie Toro tamps down her vocal firepower just enough as the wicked bruja of the west in a scarlet Day of the Dead gown. (Sydney Maresca's costumes have a let's-play-dress-up charm throughout.)

Given the brief running time, Dora's three companions are sketchier than usual. And it's not clear how dance fragments from the "[Single Ladies](#)" and "[Thriller](#)" videos manage to vanquish the witch, although nobody else in the audience seemed to mind too much. Heck, make that nobody at all in the audience.

"The Yellow Brick Road" continues through Aug. 19 at the Lucille Lortel Theater, 121 Christopher Street, West Village; (800) 497-5007, theatreworksusa.org.

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