



‘Harry Potter’ idol plays a 1960s corporate climber in revival of Frank Loesser musical

**BY MICHAEL SOMMERS
NEWJERSEYNEWSROOM.COM
BROADWAY REVIEW**

Daniel Radcliffe succeeds nicely as a musical comedy performer in the okay Broadway revival of “How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying” that opened on Sunday at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre.

Playing the corporate climber J. Pierrepont Finch (impishly created by Robert Morse in the 1961 original and later by an earnest Matthew Broderick in the 1995 revival), the bright-faced Radcliffe confidently projects this foxy character as an engaging, boyish soul who gradually wises up as he learns the game at World Wide Wickets.

Finch is a perfect role for Radcliffe as he forges his post-“Harry Potter” career. Certainly the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical can be viewed as a Harry Potter-esque story as our neophyte hero Finch battles sundry demons and sorcerers – in the case of this 1960s corporate world, it’s backstabbing executives, an evil rival in the boss’ nephew, Frump, and a red-headed Circe named Hedy LaRue – even as he develops his natural-born talents as a wizard wheeler-dealer.

In much the same way, Radcliffe is still honing his fairly modest skills as a musical theater artist. He sings pleasantly and accurately, although with little tone. He dances decently while being ably supported by the ensemble in the fancier moves. He acts the ingenuous Finch very well indeed, showing the character become craftier without losing his essential niceness.

Radcliffe possesses a lot of energy, and if his luminous powers as a star performer have yet to be fully realized, at least he twinkles very agreeably. Probably as the show continues to run, Radcliffe will shed a slight sense of well-rehearsed stiffness from his performance and assume greater ease in his already agreeable portrayal.

Slickly directed and athletically choreographed by Rob Ashford, the production is more competent than inspired. Having referenced "Mad Men" so significantly in the '60s looks of his recent "Promises, Promises" revival, Ashford presents this lighter look at corporate life as a fast-moving cartoon. The honeycomb shapes that predominate among Derek McLane's settings suggest a beehive, which is appropriate for a bustling musical situated in the workplace.



The featured players are good but their performances appear to be dialed down somewhat in deference to their star. John Larroquette makes an affable J.B. Biggley and Rose Hemingway looks pretty in pink as Rosemary. One wishes that Christopher J. Hanke provided a more eccentric spin on Frump but Tammy Blanchard's relatively subtle turn as the helplessly sexy Hedy is sweeter than the usual vixen caricature. A droll Rob Bartlett is an endearing fellow both as a mailroom drudge and as a ranking tycoon.

The amusing script by Abe Burrows, Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert holds up very well, while Frank Loesser's vigorous score remains tuneful and witty. Restoring "Cinderella Darling" to the

score (the song was cut in the last revival), Ashford cleverly choreographs the number as a clattering tap dance for the steno pool. Adding an elaborate football scrimmage sequence for the chorus guys in the middle of "Grand Old Ivy" seems like an unnecessary intrusion, but the kinetic wedge of gyrating executives that Ashford devises for "Brotherhood of Man" – featuring a brief "Swan Lake" parody – gives that number the dynamic propulsion it requires to cap the show.

While "How to Succeed" probably is a very familiar musical to veteran theatergoers, it may well be fresh to younger viewers drawn by Radcliffe's celebrity. In either case, they will see an appealing star twinkle nicely enough in a satisfactory showcase for his boyish charms.

"How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" continues at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre, 302 W. 45th St., New York. Call (212) 239-6200 or visit www.howtosucceedbroadway.com.

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