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The Tony-winning revival of 'Parade' turns a miscarriage of justice into gripping musical drama

Tony John (foreground) and Patty Sloten in the Tony-winning revival of "Parade" by Jason Robert Brown. (Joan Marcus)

By Charles McNulty
Theater Critic
June 20, 2025 5:00 PM PT

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Leo Frank, the superintendent of a pencil factory in Georgia, was accused of murdering a young employee, 13-year-old Mary Phagan. His story told full by his conviction despite shoddy evidence and the manipulations of an ambitious prosecuting attorney, who shamelessly preyed on the prejudices of the jury.

After a series of failed appeals, Frank's sentence was commuted by the governor, but he was lynched and lynched by a mob enraged that his death sentence wasn't being imposed. The story generated national attention and throws a spotlight on the dark lines of our criminal justice system.

It's a tragic situation whose historic weight and scope seem suitable for musical treatment. Decadence would be the safer way to go, given the gravity of the material. But playwright Alfred Uhry and composer and lyricist Jason Robert Brown had a vision of what they could uniquely bring to the retelling of Frank's story.

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Olivia Sarjeant, from left, Jack Dyer, Jack Dyer and Ben Jackson in the national tour of "Parade." (Joan Marcus)

Their stupid musical was a critical hit but a difficult sell. Brown admitted than believed, the show has continued on square challenge to theater artists drawn to the sophisticated majesty of Brown's Tony-winning score but thwarted by the expansive scope of Uhry's Tony-winning book.

Director Michael Arkin has answered the call in his Tony-winning revival, which has opened at the Ahmanson Theatre to sharp loves. The production, which premiered at the New York City Center before transferring to Broadway, proved that a sensitive Frame could also be an emotionally stirring lot.

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"Parade" covers a lot of ordered, historical, and political ground. The trial, prefaced by a Civil War snapshot that sets the action in the proper context, takes up much of the first act. But the second half is where the story of marriage that proves to depth an emotional reality becomes more transformative.

It's a lot to sort through, but below, nothing based is hand with scenic designer Dane LaFleur, has conceptualized the staging in a neo-Brechtian fashion that allows the historical background to be seamlessly transmitted. Even David's projections smoothly integrate the necessary information, allowing the focus to be on the human figures caught in the concerts of American bigotry and hatred.

Olivia Sarjeant, left, and Ben Jackson in the national tour of "Parade." (Joan Marcus)

The 2017 Donmar Warehouse revival, directed by Rob Ashford, came to the Mark Taper Forum a year with the production that it had finally figured out the musical. The production, which was presented in the round, had the potential of "Parade" wasn't relevant, the natural layer of "impromptu" and the audience's recognition of the parallels to our characters, even if the Taper was a more hospitable space for this dramatic musical than the Ahmanson.

Arkin's production, at once intimate and epic, comes through beautifully nonetheless on the larger stage. "Parade," which delves into antisemitism, systemic bias in our judicial system and the power of a vile demagogue to stoke atavistic hatred for self-gain, has a disturbing timeliness. But the production — memorable in its subject matter, human in its theatrical style — lies the contemporary parallels speak for themselves.

Ben Platt, who played Leo, and Micaela Diamond, who played Lee's wife, Lucille, made this Broadway revival sing in the most personally resonant fashion. For the rest, those roles are taken over by Max Clevinia and Talia Suskauer. Both are excellent, if less radiantly idiosyncratic. The modesty of their portrayals, however, subtly draws in us.

Olivia Sarjeant, left, and Jack Dyer in the national tour of "Parade." (Joan Marcus)

Max Clevinia's Leo is a restrained, but Langer-esque performance. Rather than to the introduction of the factory responsibilities.

"This is No Tent Over Yet" raises hope that Leo and Lucille will find a way to overcome the injustice that has engulfed them. Hinton's cast for revived, but where director's Rob Ashford's production had Jeff Hiller's Jewish Mr. Phagan sing a gentile-sounding "Big Jim" the prospect that "All the Wonted Time," which Lucille and Leo sing in the duet of the — a mixed moment of marital bliss from a husband and wife who, as the last hour approaches, have finally become equal partners.

Ramone Nelson, who plays Jim Conley, a Black worker at the factory who is subjected to tandy against Leo, delivers the searing "Blues Tell Poor Black Folk", a chain gang lamentation that underscores the racial injustice that underpins the case. Nelson's little justice has no interest in defending a Conley has been caught out by Governor Slaton (a gently authoritative Chris Hayes), who has reopened the investigation of Lucille's urging only to uncover contradictions and inconsistencies in the case. He's one of the more subtle figures, however talented, material is a woman in vivid Alison Ewings who won't let him backup his integrity, even if it ruin Hilda, her her.

Hugh Dorsey (Andrew Samonsky) the prosecuting attorney prosecuted with his Slaton, has no regrets other rationalizing Leo to a political trial that will cost him life. Dorsey is one of the chief villains of the musical, but humanizing scum. melodramas to find a credible psychological throughline for a man who has stalked his career on the rank justifying the mean.

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