

REVIEW

'Ordinary Days' is extraordinary theater

BY MICHAEL CASPER

For the Mirror

When Executive Director Dan Carter placed this final show of Pennsylvania Centre Stage's summer season onto the roster, it was a calculated risk.

Under the direction of Matthew Toronto with casting by Mark Simon, this world-premiere production delivers a memorable rendition of a new musical by Adam Gwon that holds considerable promise.

It's no surprise the show was selected by the National Alliance for Musical Theatre for presentation this fall at the 20th annual Festival of New Musicals in New York.

The play's premise follows the lives of two men and two women endeavoring to fulfill on their dreams and make sense of their lives in the frenetic and challenging environment of New York City.

The backdrop of a Manhattan subway map boldly painted across the floor is a simple yet effective marker of place.

A skylight-defining scrim and a few raised places to sit are the only other accoutrements, and that's more than enough as the four individuals introduce their situations and develop believable characters and humorous, touching relationships.

Gwon has stitched together a juicy bit of comic drama. What's pleasing is the combination of emotive and comical moments and the split-second timing in many of the dialogue segments and musical numbers. And the players are up to the task.

Jared Gertner plays a familiar Manhattan institution: a street-corner flyer pusher, in

If you go

- **What:** "Ordinary Days"
- **When:** 7:30 p.m. today through Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday and 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday
- **Where:** Penn State downtown Theatre Center, State College
- **Tickets:** \$24, \$30 and \$55
- **Phone:** 800-ARTS-TIX or 863-0255

this case for a struggling visual artist.

A positively romantic, dramatic (and gay) dweeb, Gertner stumbles upon the thesis notes of a female grad student and embraces their random arrival in his life as one of many life stories, before e-mailing the student to set up a meeting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Jordan Toronto is the student, a shrill, city-hardened non-New Yorker struggling to complete her thesis (and who couldn't care less about art). The two are polar opposites — their tumultuous museum rendezvous makes one both smile and wince. But something about Jared's genuine persona sticks with Jordan.

Gertner is simultaneously irritating and endearing, and as we get to know him, he seems a lot like the rest of us. Jordan Toronto is unforgettable as the alternately salty-tongued, chip-on-her-shoulder twentysomething and the tender person with a heart and an ear for others. Both can belt out the tunes with spunk and freshness. Toronto's "Don't Wanna Be Here" and Gertner's "Sort-Of Fairy Tale" are among several great numbers.

Stanley Bashorek and Leah Horowitz form a second dramatic duo, exuding the wonders of togetherness, the loneliness of separation, and what comes in between. Horowitz's character struggles with commitment and a 9/11 loss that she finally is able to move beyond.

Horowitz neatly weaves rapid shifts between multiple conversations in the comical "Canceling the Party."

Bashorek, Gertner and Horowitz have solid Broadway credits, but the entertaining performance by Jordan Toronto (who also appeared in Centre Stage's "Closer Than Ever") comes close to stealing this show.

The winding tale reaches a positive but goo-free resolution, thanks to sparing writing. "Ordinary" opens and shuts in an hour and 20 minutes with no intermission.

Gwon doesn't waste time or words; he does just enough to reel his audience in and send them off thinking.

Musical director Rick Bertone (piano) and Robert Gardner (bass) ably show what just two can do in backing the wide-ranging moments and numbers. Corey Felgenhour's lighting smoothly steers between full stage and intimate moments.

The show will also receive its UK premiere at the Finborough Theatre in London this fall.

The winding tale reaches a positive but goo-free resolution.