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DANCE REVIEW | 'SHOWDOWN'

Annie Get Your Blue Jeans (and Reverse Expectations)

By ROSLYN SULCAS

Are dances on tiny stages set to music from big Broadway musicals a new subgenre? On Friday night David Parker and the Bang Group's "ShowDown," to [Irving Berlin](#)'s songs from "Annie Get Your Gun," began a two-night engagement at Joe's Pub at the [Public Theater](#). That's the same spot that Doug Elkins's "Fräulein Maria," to a score from "The Sound of Music," had its premiere in 2006 and a rapturously received repeat run just six months ago.

Do the Dancemopolitan ladies (Robin Staff, Tamara Greenfield and Sydney Skybetter), who produce these shows in collaboration with Joe's Pub, have other ideas up their sleeves? (May I suggest Stephen Petronio and the "Rocky Horror Show"?) Because so far Mr. Elkins and Mr. Parker — who had a brilliantly comic turn as Liesl in "Fraulein Maria" — have shown audiences a very good time.

That said, "ShowDown" is not as good as "Fräulein Maria," mainly because Mr. Parker does not have Mr. Elkins's ability to produce an inexhaustibly witty supply of movement ideas and make them look coherent on a stage the size of a large desk.

"ShowDown" is set to recordings by [Judy Garland](#) and Howard Keel, made for the 1950 film of "Annie," in which Garland was ultimately replaced by [Betty Hutton](#). Large swaths are choreographically repetitive, with an over-reliance on slinging the eight dancers around one another's bodies and on static poses held with knowing looks. And its relationship to the original story lies mostly in its reversal of gender expectations; women lifting men or men performing deadpan pas de deux.

But Mr. Elkins greatly improved "Fräulein Maria" between its original season and last year's shows, and there is no reason Mr. Parker, who displays a lively musicality, shouldn't do the same with "ShowDown." As it picks up pace after a slow beginning, Mr. Parker begins to seed the work with ingenious, often funny, ideas: a soft-shoe shuffle for Nic Petry to "I Got the Sun in the Morning," intertwining same- and opposite-sex duos in "They Say It's Wonderful," a "Bayadère"-worthy overhead lift of one man by another at the end of "Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better."

The style is ballet-meets-everything-else (a study in tendu position — a straight, extended leg, toes pointed on the floor — in "My Defenses Are Down" turns into slow, oddly poetic cartwheels). And the dancers, dressed in jeans and checked shirts, perform with a lovely sense of spontaneity, none more so than Amber Sloan, who seems closer to the character of Annie than anyone else. When the piece ends, with a group reprise of "There's No Business Like Show Business," it's over too soon.

And then it isn't. Mr. Parker appears and, with Jeffrey Kazin, offers a "bonus track" — a marvelous rendition of "Old-Fashioned Wedding," complete with tap routine. Then you really don't want it to be over. And it is.

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