

Picture Perfect

By Kathy Ceceri

The Girl in the Frame

By JEREMY DESMON, DIRECTED BY THOMAS CARUSO
ADIRONDACK THEATRE FESTIVAL, THROUGH JULY 2

FOR THE FIRST FEW MINUTES, *The Girl in the Frame* seems to be a straightforward romantic comedy about two city dwellers: Laney (Stephanie Kurtzuba), a workaholic executive, and her slacker fiancé, Alex (Todd Cerveris), who, in a neat twist, despairs of getting the woman he loves to set the date. Not only is Laney late getting back from a business trip for their anniversary evening out, she spends the whole time taking phone calls, then flits out again without eating a bite. The couple barely has time to exchange gifts, which turn

fantasy woman (Vicki Van Tassel), not only whips up a scrumptious chocolate soufflé, she does it during commercials in the Yankees game. But Alex's idyllic days of strip poker and gourmet meals are short-lived. When Laney returns from Madrid to find his dirty little secret, Evelyn is replaced by a red-hot Mr. October from the NYFD's beefcake calendar, whom Laney names Tomas. Dumb but eager to please, Tomas (Victor Wallace) fulfills the normally unglamorous Laney's fantasies by dressing up as an international man of mystery or a prince, as her whims dictate, and taking her shopping. Of course, complications ensue, but everything works out in the end, as all good romantic comedies require.



Fantasy life: (l-r) Cerveris, Wallace and Kurtzuba in *The Girl in the Frame*.

out to be identical picture frames packaged with a photo of a girl running through a field in a flowing white sun dress, a flower in her hair—someone very unlike Laney herself. The career woman is hurt at the implication that her accomplishments don't make her the feminine ideal.

"No one lives mid-twirl, Alex," she scolds him, as she runs off to catch the red-eye to Europe.

But then things take a surrealistic turn—and if you'd rather not spoil the surprise, stop reading right here and go see this funny musical, filled with wonderful performances and packed with keen observations about modern life and relationships.

What schlumpy Alex discovers when he gets home from his abortive candlelit dinner is that the beautiful girl in the frame is ready and willing to fulfill his every desire. Evelyn, as he names his

Writer Jeremy Desmon's script is witty and original, and his songs, influenced by pop and theater icons like Billy Joel and William Finn, are enjoyable and sometimes clever. But they're nowhere as memorable, or as integral to the play, as they should be to make *The Girl in the Frame* not just a great show but a great musical. The cast, however, sings and acts with aplomb, and together with ATF veteran director Thomas Caruso, they fill the evening with energy and pizzazz. Every aspect of the production—the sound by Michael Creason, the frame-motif minimalist set by Eric Renschler, and the fun costumes by Carol Brys—are punched up just a tad, in keeping with the mood of magical realism. As with last year's *Mimi le Duck*, *The Girl in the Frame* is a new type of farce, hilarious but not totally frivolous: a chocolate soufflé with some heft. Enjoy. □