



Arts: Performing Arts

## The prophecies of Lockstock and Barrel

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By [Perry Tannenbaum](#)

Transferring to the Henry Miller Theatre on September 20, 2001, *Urinetown* was the first of those theater mutants that seemed to spring up spontaneously on- and off-Broadway in the wake of the attack on the Twin Towers -- followed by *Topdog/Underdog*, *Homebody/Kabul*, *Bat Boy the Musical*, and *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*

What continues to distinguish *Urinetown* from the others is how pointedly prophetic it has turned out to be. It was the only oddity among those I've listed that opened off-Broadway before 9/11, but that's really hair-splitting when you consider that all of these beautifully deformed scripts must have been completed before Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda redefined the New Millennium.

Even as it deconstructs American musicals and cynically satirizes their audience, *Urinetown* shows us a metropolis that has been seriously weakened and corrupted by ill-conceived reactions to a truly urgent global crisis. So the book by Greg Kotis hits us as so much more brilliant today than in those early post-9/11 days when images of Giuliani and Bush at Ground Zero were dancing in our heads.

Kudos, then, to UNC Charlotte for finally bringing this seminal anti-musical to town. Anita Tripathi Easterling's set design echoed the depressing look of the original Broadway production without aping the courtyard-style scaffolding that has become a theater clichÉ in the past decade. Master costumer Bob Croghan, our original Theaterperson of the Year back in 1987, still has the gift, going with wonderfully complementary Depression Era costumes.

James Vesce deftly cast and directed a mix of more than 30 student and faculty performers. Jonathan Caudill as Officer Lockstock perfectly grasped the straight-arrow starchiness of our raisonneur's answers to the eternally upbeat and inquisitive Little Sally, portrayed with a perfectly juvenile peskiness and pluck by Bettina Martin. Even if youngish Daniel Pietruszka seemed less than senatorial as Senator Fipp, he came off as plausibly in the pocket of convincingly grayed Ken Burrows as evil industrialist Caldwell B. Cladwell, master of the Urine Good Company urinal empire.

As the central couple, the revolutionary firebrand Bobby Strong and Caldwell's pure-hearted daughter Hope, A.J. Swanson and Caroline Clifton generated the proper alternating fervid-and-chaste current. Jay Marong as the martyred Old Man Strong ñ the man who *couldn't* pay to pee -- and Kelly Mizell-Ryan as adamantine gatekeeper Penelope Pennywise contributed glittering gems to the evening.

About the only visual element missing at Amenity #9 in the future Gotham was the loo itself where citizens queued up. Sonically, we weren't nearly as lucky. Each time we visited Mark Hollmann's musical score, nearly all the lyrics capsized beneath the six-piece band directed Randy Haldeman. With nuggets like "It's a Privilege to Pee" and "Don't Be the Bunny," we perceive the loss of the words as more than petty theft.

Students up in the light booth experimented briefly with audibility in Act 2, thought better of it, and reverted to the customary discomfort zone. Members of the complacent UNCC faculty missed an important reality check there. While the program has made substantial progress in bridging the gap between it and the nationally-respected program at UNC Greensboro, they are still far from closing the gulf.