

## Broadway Live Insider

Michael J. Miller

ON YOUR FEET

Opening Night

If you've been thinking about how unseasonably warm January has been around these parts, just wait until the hot as hell opening moments of the latest Broadway Live offering at the Lexington Opera House. ON YOUR FEET erupts in the first few seconds with an explosion of light and sound that had me immediately in its grip.

A "Behind the Music" take on the multi-Grammy winning Gloria Estefan and the Miami Sound Machine might easily have been dismissed as just another jukebox musical, but rises to greatness with intensive participation with the actual artists who were there for it all.

Gloria's husband Emilio is the one who brought the original show to Broadway a few years ago, and the current tour is helmed by Director Luis Salgado, who originated the role of choreographer Kenny Ortega in the Broadway version directed by Jerry Mitchell, who personally handed over the directorial reins to him for this tour.

The electric Latin choreography is phenomenal and the ensemble and lead actors bring it to vivid life in some of the most energetic production numbers to grace the Opera House stage in years.

Gaby Albo and Samuel Garnica are the embodiment of Gloria and Emilio. Albo's vocals and high-energy dance performance thrill, and Garnica is, in a word, hot. Very.

Plot-wise, the first act whisks through Gloria's upward climb, with much emphasis on the early difficulty she and the band were faced with trying to convince the powers that be to give their Latin tunes a chance on American radio. Act two gets a dramatic turn, as the group's tour bus collides with a truck, leaving her with spinal injuries that almost ended her career. The drama in the second act is palpable, but they obviously had a bit of trouble finding Miami Sound Machine songs to forward the story. Gloria did pen a new song for the show's second act, which attempts to address the issue.

The production is visually stunning, with atmospheric projections by Patrick W. Lord, mind-numbing concert lighting by Christopher Annas-Lee and colorful costumes created by Jeannette Christensen.

As is the norm for such Broadway offerings, the whole thing is wrapped up in the end by a medley of Miami Sound Machine hits. That final ten minutes or so is probably the best concert

I'll see on this or any stage this year. And unlike some other "jukebox" musicals, this one makes the journey to the final payoff just as thrilling as the final curtain call.

Sure, we'll probably be back below freezing and scraping off windshields come February, but at least this weekend, it's a sultry fiesta at the Opera House. You'll be tempted to forgo your bourbon and branch for a Cuba Libre at the concession stand. Arriba, abajo, al centro, pa dentro!