

Heaven as a Funny Place Full of Love

*277DanceProject's
This is Heaven to Me
at Dixon Place*

By **QUINN BATSON**
Offoffoff.com

The joy of watching a piece that clicks leaves a glow when the show is over. 277DanceProject's *This is Heaven to Me* fit the new Dixon Place space perfectly — a rare feat — and clicked all the way through, in a well paced fantasy comedy about the perils and pitfalls of romance and romantic innocence. So much of *This is Heaven to Me* feels familiar and seen-before, but this never feels wrong. Things open in a cafe of small tables, for example, in cinematic "takes", with small twists and different characters being featured while a couple does a tango-ish duet. Leisurely timing and lingering looks imply history and intrigue. This is dance fleshed out on a theater skeleton, and the two elements meld beautifully. The dialogue — all questions — between Olgierd Minkiewicz and Stacey Cervellino, that has him asking her to dance and her jumping them ahead through dating and marriage and divorce, is masterful and hilarious, for example. Cervellino and choreographer Nicole Philippidis are listed as co-creators, and Cervellino and Kevin Chu are duly noted as members of Actors Equity Association, but the entire ensemble looks good both acting and dancing. The melange of dance and theater, with elements of cinema — a young couple in front of a simple projection of a foreign city, and Mika Yanagihara's solo in front of a dreamier video projection of herself dancing — allow otherwise awkward breaks in action to feel fine here; the staging relaxes us into accepting and looking forward to whatever comes next. And a bit of a French theme, often as shorthand for romance or romantic fantasy, is equal parts silly and natural.



**L-R: Saya Harada, Ben Wolk, Mika Yanagihara,
Hannah Emerson, Keven Chu**



Photo by Jaqlin Medlock

Jordan Gehley, Stacey Cervellino, Saya Harada, Ben Wolk, Nicole Phillippidis, Hannah Emerson, Olgierd Minkiewicz, Mika Yanagihara, Kevin Chu

Phillippidis and Cervellino have a lot of fun with the games people play to get attention from the opposite sex and to keep things interesting as couples. Two full-cast sections of broad farce — one with everyone in very high, very pink heels and another with the classic mix of cad and cat behavior, people flitting off after the next attractive newcomer and an unending succession of uneven triangles and unexpected partnerings — follow smaller hijinx among couples and small groups. As in any successful humor, loss and darkness lurk throughout. The late arrival of a true innocent, played sweetly by Alissa Smith, may be a central element in the cat/cad scene, or may be not; the beauty of *This Is Heaven to Me* is that no one thing, good or bad, gets special attention in this look at love. Innocence is here both to be celebrated and lost, and life is to be revealed in.

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