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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ PERFORMING ARTS

Jasper's Journey

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Jasper's Journey, a musical drama with original song lyrics, is the story of James Jasper Jenkins, a former headlining Broadway entertainer. A song-and-dance man and star of stage and screen for more than fifteen years, Jasper ruins his career and his relationship with his family through apathy and alcoholism. He becomes homeless and, while living on the streets, has a nearly fatal life-changing experience that involves a robbery and gunplay. He decides to get a job, regardless of how menial, and finds works as a janitor in an office building. An all-too-convenient coincidence reconnects him with his estranged son. Jasper anticipates a possible reconciliation with the rest of his family, but just when he shows growth and the story becomes more interesting, it comes to an abrupt and painful end.

The heart-wrenching scenes of Jasper living on the street feel too staged; they read as interpretetations of street life found in the media, not based on reality. The street scenes are interpersped with brief scenes in which members of Jasper's family—his wife, daughter, and son—talk about him. The dialogue among these characters fails to contibute to the dramatic action, does not reveal any new information, and adds nothing to the story line. As the director, playwright, and screenwriter David Mamet has said, "Anytime two characters are talking about a third, the scene is a crock…"

Some of the street scenes end with the lyrics for the original songs, but their placement within the story are uneven. There are three or four songs in the beginning of the book, but there is no song at the end. Most musicals conclude with an intense song, a finale that usually involves the entire cast and that sums up the entire performance.

Musicals are made up of three major components: The music (the score), the book (the story line), and the choreography (the movement of the characters). In a successful musical, these three components blend together and complement each other. *Jasper's Journey* has the book and the lyrics to the songs but lacks the actual musical notation and the choreography; these omissions make it hard to judge the book's merits as a musical drama. As a dramatic novel, *Jasper's Journey* is clichéd. Jasper is a likable character, but the story line plays it safe within a confined bubble of cause-and-effect morality until the very end. The conclusion makes the scenes that came before seem stilted. At the same time, the ending could have been powerful and poignant with an all-cast song finale.
LEE GOODEN (November 14, 2012)

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