



Wednesday, August 27, 2008

Fringe/Tim Gunn's Podcast (a reality chamber opera)

Taking *Project Runway's* dapper and avuncular mentor Tim Gunn's podcast and turning it into a one-man chamber opera is certainly, in the *Runway* vernacular, "taking a risk," but Jeffrey Lependorf makes it work with a production that captures all the drama of the sewing workroom in a fresh and unexpected way.

Review by Ilena George

For those unfamiliar with the premise of *Project Runway*, a quick synopsis: one of few reality shows where contestants do more than hook up and argue with each other, *Runway* pits fashion designers against each other through one-to-two day challenges ranging from "make a dress out of items you can find in a grocery store" to "make a high fashion outfit for an ice skater to compete in" to "make a dress inspired by New York City at night."

This particular "podcast" focuses on the second episode of the third season, where the designers were challenged to create an evening dress for Miss USA winner Tara Connor to wear during the Miss Universe pageant. Think "red carpet, not pageant," advises Gunn. In this episode, two of the season's wackiest designers—Vincent and Angela—butt heads when they are paired together to complete a dress.

Another essential facet of *Runway* includes its judges' colorful invectives and jubilant praise; Gunn's podcast is no exception, with references to Judy Jetson's birthday party, the Yule log, and a "homely bag of garbage." John Schenkel's portrayal of Gunn is enjoyable to both fans and newcomers. Schenkel's rich baritone and the expressiveness of the music's phrasing conveys all the drama and horror of ruching-gone-wrong, partnerships made in Hell, and the importance of making your client happy. Steering away from parody, the production refrains from mimicking Gunn's mannerisms, letting the words do most of the heavy lifting. Clever and engaging, *Tim Gunn's Podcast* is far from one-note.

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Tim Gunn's Podcast: A Reality Chamber Opera

Directed by Linda Lehr

Book and music by Jeffrey Lependorf

The Jazz Gallery (290 Hudson Street)