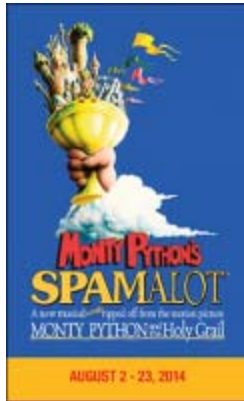


LTA's Spamalot: Spam With A Side Of Sophistication

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The year is 932 A.D. The country is England. Is this a musical or a history lesson? Fortunately, LTA's *Spamalot* whisks us away to Finland in the first number of the show, where smiling, blonde men and women greet us, singing the praises of...the wrong country. Mishaps of this kind characterize this slapstick smorgasbord of a show, based on the 1975 Monty Python film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. The 2005 Broadway production won three Tony awards, including the Tony for Best Musical.

Fade in on Arthur, King of the Britains, followed by his loyal coconut-clapping manservant, Patsy (Matt Liptak). Together, with the help of their valiant (if not peculiar) Knights of the Round Table, they set off on a quest to find the Holy Grail, per request of the beautiful, mysterious, Lady of the Lake. What unfolds is scene after scene of gags, kitsch, slapstick—and fart jokes from the French.

From the first plot-moving number ("I'm Not Dead Yet") LTA's cast proved energetic and eclectic, yet managed to blend as an ensemble. What truly makes LTA's *Spamalot* a treat is the unflinching, cockeyed optimism of its players and the constant, goofy smiles plastered across their faces. Stand out performances were Liptak as Patsy the faithful—if somewhat neglected—servant of Arthur, Dimitri Gann as the uppity, weak-boweled Sir Robin, Patrick McMahan as the closeted Sir Lancelot, and Ashlie-Amber Harris as the Lady of the Lake.

Liptak showed off his vocal and dancing chops in the adorable, hokey "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life." In it, he contrasted beautifully between his overall bedraggled, subservient characterization and his campy facial expressions and dance moves. He especially complemented Arthur's doom and gloom during that scene. The rest of the bumbling knights meshed perfectly, with Lancelot's loud, brash humor countering Sir Robin's quiet snobbery. In the number "Sir Robin and His Minstrels," a certain minstrel stood out with hysterical enthusiasm and a cockeyed grin. That same minstrel also brilliantly played Lancelot's future lover, singing sweet, girlish praises as enthusiastic boys in neon bodysuits with ruched cardigans danced around them.

However, the true star was Harris as the Lady of the Lake, whose lush soprano reached dizzying heights and sultry lows. She stole the show with exaggerated facial expressions during hammed up romantic ballads such as "The Song That Goes Like This" and "Find Your Grail," with Sir Galahad and King Arthur, respectively. Yet the crowning moment of her royal performance was "Whatever Happened to My Part," a ballad of diva proportions, with flawlessly executed transitions between nuanced runs and a soaring belt. She brought the house down after holding the money note for what felt like days.

Perhaps it's the writing, but *Spamalot* feels a bit disjointed, as if it were a patchwork of skits loosely held together by too simple of an overarching plot—getting the Holy Grail, a pretty obvious symbol for female sexuality. LTA's cast coped with this disjointedness by overcommitting to their quirkiness and asking for the sandwich, not the laugh. And that's what makes this production so endearing—the ceaseless, absurd optimism of a quest for satisfaction that may never resolve quite the way the storybooks end.