

Joyful Noise a tale for all the outcasts

REVIEW by **SCOTT DELL**

The Observer

What's that sound? Did she drop that baby? Oh god, where are her clothes? Good idea; I would like a throat lozenge!

The opening of the East Side Players' *Joyful Noise*, onstage at the PaperMill Theatre on Pottery Road tonight through Nov. 5, is as comically dark and full of wit as it is surprising. But the play starts with a joyous bang and struggles a bit to reach that height again.

This is a story revolving around a blasphemous oratory and the church's struggle to repress it.

It thematically resonates with the story of sexual violence and "slut shaming," as Susannah Cibber is forced into adultery by a scheming husband and cast from society.

While the first half is a joy of comic and dramatic interplay, teeming with great



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The East Side Players rehearse for *Joyful Noise*, premiering tonight at the Papermill Theatre.

one-liners and a cocktail of top-shelf characters mixed into a fine theatrical martini, the second half begins to drag somewhat as the story fails to raise the stakes enough to carry it to its climax.

But besides the story's obsession with the trivial, the East Side Players put on a performance that's carried at a strong clip — strong enough to win this theatrical derby.

Kitty Clive, the tough-talking Londoner, is played with such dry, cool wit that she could win your heart with a mid-dinner hiccup. Coupled with a voice from the gods, she makes the religious music sing like something that is finally worthy of the term "heavenly."

The role is modulated so well that she remains endlessly endearing despite being a

pompous... what's another word for donkey?

Meanwhile, our heroine Susannah Cibber's emotional range is borderline mystifying, and her ability to switch seamlessly between forlorn singing, Christmas joy and good old-fashioned bloodlust bring much-needed freshness to the second half.

While the play is replete with heroes, they are offset by the scheming Bishop, peeping in the king's ear with desires so uncharitable he may have gone on to single-handedly cause the great witch-hunt.

When Cibber finally makes her stand against a society that has rejected her, a tear fell from the eye of this reviewer, as I watched her defiance and remembered the day that I took a deep breath, curled my first, and stood up against my bully.

This is a story for the outcast, letting us remember the day we drew a line in the sand and became our own hero.