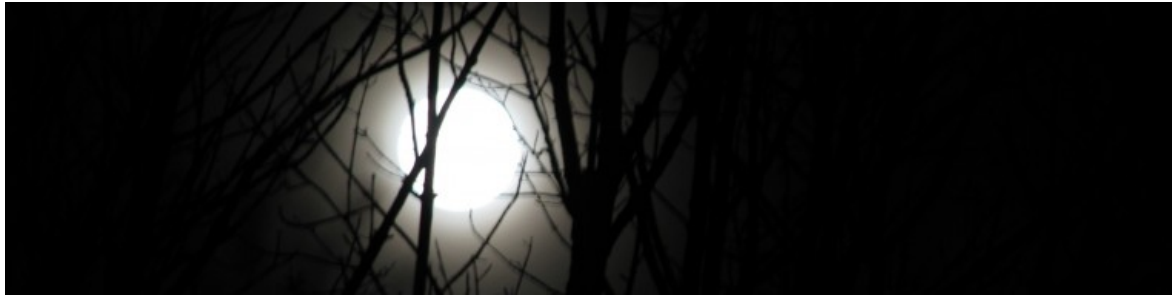


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Xanadu (Christ Church Neig July 13, 2014)

July 18, 2014 by Paul Debraski

[ATTENDED: July 13, 2014] **Xanadu**

The movie *Xanadu* has been a long lost guilty pleasure of mine since I was a kid. I remember watching the movie and not caring that it was weird or, stupid or whatever. I loved *Grease* and therefore I loved Olivia Newton John. And while I didn't love E.L.O., I certainly loved the soundtrack to this movie about, well, whatever it was about.



I have the soundtrack on vinyl, and I clearly listened to it hundreds of times because when the songs popped up in this production, I knew if not all the words, then certainly the melodies. I haven't seen the movie since the 80s, though, and I didn't watch it before going into this play. And, indeed, I didn't even know that the play was different from the movie, but I am so glad it was.

The musical (which was on Broadway) takes the basic sketches of the movie (which was pretty much just sketches anyway) and makes a new, very funny and very meta- (jokes about the movie and about the 80s among other things) look at the original, while keeping the characters and the music. And man did I laugh a lot. It helped that I knew the movie, but it wasn't necessary for full enjoyment.

The basic plot is that Sonny is an artist. He is inspired by a mural of Greek muses. And after he gives up on his latest painting, the muses come to life and decide to inspire him. The main muse is Clio who will come to earth "with an Australian accent" (for Olivia Newton John, of course) and call herself Kira. Kira plans to help Sonny to open a club. A club where there will be roller disco. Naturally there is a bad guy—the creator of the club who once loved music but is now all about money. And, since there are gods involved, there is bound to be mischief, as Clio's sisters don't want to see her get Xanadu as she was promised. Their mischief is to make her fall in love—which will get her banished from Mt Olympus.

Amazingly enough, this crazy plot is much simpler and sensible than the original movie plot.

The show keeps the ten songs from the soundtrack (the hits were "Magic," "Suddenly," and "Xanadu" (the ON-J songs) and "All Over the World" (The ELO song)) and it adds a few extra songs that fit perfectly ("Evil Woman" and "Have You Never Been Mellow"). I was thrilled to hear the song "Dancin'" (which in the original was a duet with The Tubes). In the movie and the play, "Dancin'" involves a big band which melds with a "rock" band and I always thought the song was really cool (it was certainly cooler then). Here's the interesting thing about the show, as I've listened to the soundtrack recently: I enjoyed the music in the play more than I do the soundtrack. True, the band (drums, guitar, keyboard) was much simpler and raw than the uber-produced disco sensation, but that's why I liked the show better. They kept the music but added a new sense of urgency and spunk (the originals songs are a bit slow). And they were amazingly unobtrusive.

The acting was fantastic, too. [Erica Nicole Rothman](#) played Clio/Kira. She did a wonderful job not only with the Australian accent (okay, it was a little shaky but overall very solid), but she

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also had a great singing voice (singing while roller skating mind you) and she had a very good sense of comic timing. [C.J. Celeiro](#) played Sonny and he pulled off some great moments where you are just convinced that Sonny is the stupidest guy on earth, and yet he can whip into a song like nobody's business. The supporting cast was fantastic too, with particular shouts going to [Angela Leone](#) and [Dylan Geringer](#) who played Melopmene (the "Evil Woman") and Calliope respectively. Leone was very good at being evil (we ran into her outside and she was sweet as pie). And Geringer was so unabashedly silly, so genuinely unafraid to look foolish, that she totally brought the house down with her funny dancing, funny asides and crazy accents. All of the nine sisters were great, but it was especially fun to see two of them played by men. I also wanted to give a good nod to [Paul Weagraff](#) who played Danny, the club's owner. He was wicked, but also pulled off some great singing and some nice dance moves as well. He brought a solid "serious" presence to the goofiness of the show.

I don't know what the Broadway show was like, but Mazepa Productions did amazing work with the small scale (and presumably small budget) of their production. Mazepa Production is a not-for-profit theater troupe. And, yes, I went to school with the director of this play Rob Henry, but that didn't impact my enjoyment of the show (although he did do a great job). I won't reveal the surprise set up of the stage, but I will reveal that there is ample roller skating, lots of singing and a light-up-neon sign.

It was a great time. I laughed and even teared up once or twice. Sarah also loved it. We even brought the kids. And while they had no idea what was going on, they enjoyed the music and the theatricality of it all. There's really nothing inappropriate about the show (except for a very funny "bitch!" line, and most of the innuendo will just go over their heads anyhow. But it's fun to see small theater where the actors are so close to you.

So, if you've looking for a fun show (90 min.) and a good cause (not-for profit theater) and you're in Philly (until the 26th), do check out [Xanadu](#) ([click for tickets](#)), because who doesn't want to have Olivia Newton-John songs stuck in their head for a week?

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