



## Broadway's Best "Waitress" serves up all the ingredients for a great show

by Mike Cohen, Photography: Joan Marcus

**T**here are many reasons to go to New York City, but the extraordinary selection of Broadway productions heads the list.

*Waitress* is a musical based on the 2007 cult Indie movie starring Keri Russell, showing at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre (256 West 47th Street, between Broadway and Eighth Avenue).

The storyline revolves around Jenna (Mueller), a waitress and expert pie maker stuck in a small town and a loveless marriage. Faced with an unexpected pregnancy, she fears she may have to abandon the dream of opening her own pie shop forever... until a baking contest in a nearby county and the town's handsome new doctor offer her a tempting recipe for happiness. Supported by her quirky crew of fellow waitresses and loyal customers, she summons the secret ingredient she's been missing all along – courage.

Even before seeing this show, I knew that it was full of promising ingredients. The catchy music and lyrics were written by five-time Grammy Award-nominated singer songwriter Sara Bareilles and the direction was done by Tony Award-winner Diane Paulus.

Yes, the show will make you hungry for pie. The delicious-looking pies on both sides of the stage, featured in tall glass freezers, along with the ones integrated into the story, will make you hungry enough to buy some pie from the vendors. Each pie is sold in a small jar at \$10 each with the phrase "it only takes a taste," also the title of a song from the show, written on top.

While pie is prominently featured, the real star is Jessie Mueller, winner of the 2014 Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical for *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*. Mueller elevates an already excellent show with the quality of her performance, for which she was nominated for a Tony Award this year.

Mueller is nothing short than fabulous to watch. When I saw the movie *Waitress*, it reminded me of the movie *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and the TV show *Alice*. This is likely because at the diner where she works, Jenna, like Alice, has two interesting co-workers. Becky (Keala Settle) is strong and full of funny quips.

Dawn (Kimiko Glenn from the popular Netflix series *Orange is the New Black*) is an awkward girl who unexpectedly finds love with an odd man named Ogie, played hilariously by Christopher Fitzgerald. He won a Drama Desk Award and was nomi-

nated for a Tony for his performance, including his show stopping number "Never Ever Getting Rid of Me."

Another standout is Drew Gehling, who plays Dr. Pomatter. His affair with Jenna is scandalous and hilarious to watch, in part due to his superb comedic timing.

From the moment the curtain rises, when Mueller belts out the fabulous and catchy song "Opening Up," you are immediately hooked. Having seen the movie, I wondered how they would adjust the storyline to include music. Well, songwriter Bareilles did a magnificent job. The show is two and a half hours, with intermission, and it rolls by quickly.

Producers have announced a national tour of the show will kick off at Cleveland's Playhouse Square in October 2017. ■

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