



## Peter Filichia's **DIARY**

October 8, 2007

### Festival Festivities

*Such Good Friends* was a smash in every way. Good musicals where one person writes the book, music, and lyrics are exceedingly rare, but add Noel Katz's name to the list of great achievers. The show starts out with a just-married couple driving to their Niagara Falls honeymoon, only to find that their mother-in-law is in back seat. Just when you're saying, "This isn't so funny," you find that it's actually a sketch on *The Dottie Francis Show*, one of those comedy 'n' music variety shows that dotted the airwaves in the '50s. Dottie's the star, Danny's head writer, Gabe's director, and they're *Such Good Friends* as well as colleagues. Dottie and Danny were almost more than that, and if you smell a love plot coming, not quite, though in the second act, this wisp of an idea bears terrific fruit.

Before that, though, we see Liz Larsen as Dotty, Jeff Talbott as Danny, and Brad Oscar as Gabe cavorting, making us wish that there were such a variety show each week. If there were, these three would be household names. For that matter, the TV show should hire *Such Good Friends* director Marc Bruni and choreographer Wendy Seyb to work with them each week, for they delivered a production that could move to Broadway right now. *Right now*. RIGHT NOW.

But just when *Such Good Friends* threatens to be about nothing but nostalgia, it suddenly gets very serious. The triumvirate isn't happy with one Senator Joseph McCarthy, and, in protest, they decide to write a thinly disguised sketch about a witchhunt on next week's show. Alas, it's too thinly disguised, and all three are called into for severe questioning by the House Un-American Activities Commission.

For a show that started out like a lark and lulled the audience into thinking this would be one long nostalgia trip, *Such Good Friends* offered astonishing tension in the second act, where Katz perfectly came to grips with his material, often in unexpected ways, and occasionally having its characters surprise and/or disappoint us. It's one thing to write an apt, craft-filled, melodious score, which Katz did, but we all know the book is the hardest part, and his work there was just as accomplished. Never in the entire festival did I feel as audience so rapt with attention. Afterwards, someone said, "It's not that you could hear a pin drop; you could hear a tear drop." That person must have heard mine, for I wept – partly at the plight of the characters, but partly because I'm so moved when I encounter an all-too-rare work of quality. Thanks, Noel, and everyone else with *Such Good Friends*.

12:01 AM | **Peter Filichia**

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