



Tim Howard stars as the ambitious J. Pierrepont Finch in "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" at Town Hall Arts Center. *Courtesy photo*

'How to Succeed' is stage success

*Lighthearted musical
has long theater history*

By Sonya Ellingboe

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As lights go up at Littleton's Town Hall Arts Center, the audience sees young, ambitious J. Pierrepont Finch (Tim Howard) as a window washer on a New York building — strapped into the basket that carries him to those high windows. He is reading the book he has adopted as his guide to life: "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying."

A voice (Steve Cassidy) reads the current instruction and there's a flash and a ding-a-ling — a frequent occurrence as Ponty pursues his chosen career and lifestyle.

Next, we see him at the World Wide Wicket Company, applying for — and getting — a mailroom job, and meeting sweet Rosemary (Cara Lippitt), who in best '50s style would be "Happy to Keep His Dinner Warm." The office set is well designed by Tim Barbiaux, with lighting by Seth Alison and sound by John Rivera. Costumes by Cindy Franke are true to the period and nicely detailed.

Ponty soon meets the big boss, Biggly (Ed Hickok), a caricature of corporate types, with a secret hobby — and the rest of a well-chosen cast of 22 that cycles through office-related song and dance numbers, skillfully directed by Robert Wells and choreographed by Kelly Kates. The men in the cast, in particular, present a great variety of physical and character types, which adds a layer of fun. (They can all dance.)

Ponty cycles through various levels at World Wide Wicket in the course of two-plus

hours and ends up in that top office, of course, through scenes with ditty Hedy LaRue (Nicole Campbell), also a caricature — of the office sex bomb — and bossy office manager Miss Jones (Tracy Kern). His nemesis, Frump (Cory Wendling), slinks through most days, scowling and trying to cause trouble.

Voices are strong and staging is clever, reflecting Wells' tongue-in-cheek perspective. He suggests that this is "Mad Men" without the angst."

Wells also notes in his program comments that this lighthearted musical, based on a funny guide by Shepherd Mead, opened on Broadway in 1961, won seven Tony Awards, the New York Drama Critics Award and the 1962 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. "It is a satire of 'big business' in an era when all executives were men, secretaries were women, sexual harassment hadn't been noticed ..." There was a successful revival in 2011 with Daniel Radcliffe as Finch.

One can see why it won awards — in spite of its goofy story, it's tightly written by Jack Weinstock, Abe Burrows and Willi Gilbert and staged with precise timing, great dance numbers, entertaining songs and a lively score by Frank Loesser.

This is a delightful production — sure to send one out smiling. It would be fun for all but the youngest kids.

IF YOU GO

"How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" plays through Oct. 12 at Town Hall Arts Center, 2450 W. Main St. in downtown Littleton. Performances: 7:30 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays; 2 p.m. Sundays and Sept. 27; also 6:30 p.m. on Oct. 5. Tickets: \$23-\$42, TownHallArtsCenter.org, 303-794-2787 ext 5.



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