

Behind the Circus Curtains: A Critique, and Summary of *Water for Elephants*

By Stormy Bleecker

Recently, I had the honor to watch the production of *Water for Elephants*. The musical follows the life of Jacob Jankowski (Kyle Selig), a young man who just lost his parents and his journey of found family in the circus. The show is based on the novel of the same name by Sara Gruen.

The musical opens with an old man, who we later learn is Jacob, at a circus. He begins to tell the story of his time with the Benzini Brothers Circus. We see his life as the veterinarian for the circus. Jacob soon meets Marlena (Isabelle McCalla), the wife of the ringmaster August (Paul Alexander Nolan) and falls in love with her while helping her to train her elephant.

The show mixes dance and acrobats beautifully. While most current musicals on Broadway have fewer dance numbers often having a small dance crew, *Water for Elephants* has a full cast number for almost every song. Each dance member seemed to have a background in circus and, or dance, which allowed the choreographers to paint a magnificent story through dance. During the second scene we see Jacob on the top of a train car. The lighting throughout the song made it seem as if he was truly on a train. The lighting throughout the entire musical truly transported the audience into the world.

Bringing animals to life on stage is a tricky thing to do but *Water for Elephants* does it perfectly. Each member of the crew takes control of a puppet and embodies that animal. When we first see the elephant, it is just a trunk, but throughout the play to the climax of the elephant's act we get more parts until we see the full elephant.

While the technical parts of the show were done perfectly, the plot was lacking. It was the same as most stories with the main character falling for a girl he cannot have and getting her anyway. This essential part makes me wonder if that is why it is closing next month. But if you have the chance to see it before it closes, I would highly recommend it because it is a marvelous show.