

**IN REVIEW:** *Cast and crew look on tough task of parody*

# MYT soars with *City of Angels*

BY LIZ WYATT  
Correspondent

*City of Angels*, the Broadway musical, is not to be confused with the recent Nicholas Cage film of the same name. Eschewing heavenly messengers, it is a witty and sophisticated spoof of film noir and the manners, morals and materialism of 1940s Hollywood.

Produced by Markham Youth Theatre and staged at Markham Theatre earlier this month, the show won eight Tonys and several critics' awards when it opened a two-year Broadway run in 1989. It was written by the acerbic Larry Gelbart (*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, TV's *M\*A\*S\*H*), with music by Cy Coleman and lyrics by David Zippel.

Our hero, a cheating husband but an appealing screenwriter named Stine (Will Stokes), struggles to sort out his personal life and to maintain his artistic integrity against the philistine movie mogul Buddy Fidler (Joel Buxton).

Stine's emerging screenplay is influenced by the characters and events of his own life — and has more twists and turns than a licorice whip. As he writes (and sometimes rewrites), the scenes in his head are played out before us in black and white, as they will appear in the movie-to-be.

First-time director Tim Hawco is challenged with the huge task of making all of this clear to the audience. And he succeeds quite well, although some of the transitions between the coloured framing scenes and the movie-within-the-play might have been crisper.

And parody is tough. It must be played dead straight, but with the high energy, broad strokes and strong projection — mics or no mics. This high style was achieved only intermittently, but most of these problems could well be attributed to opening night jitters.

Hawco has instilled his cast with a good sense of satire and an understanding of the genre it targets. He has achieved some memorable moments and he uses Andrew Prestwich's impressive, two-storey set and lighting to good advantage in maintaining the flow of the scenes and delineating their locale.

Stokes gives a commanding perfor-

mance as the beleaguered Raymond Chandler-like detective novelist Stine. He plays and sings with strength and musicality and is utterly engaging and believable throughout.

As Stine's alter-ego and hero, the hard-boiled detective Stone, Jonathan David makes a good stab at the required laconic character and deadpan delivery, particularly in his voice-overs.

Buxton is oddly likable and relaxed in the dual roles of the odious Buddy and his screen counterpart Bombast and manic self-absorption are missing in these villains. Scott Wandless as Pancho/Munos has a wonderful sense of style, but his heavy hispanic accent tends to muddy his lines.

The quartet of female leads put in fine work, both vocally and as actors. Lidia Guadagnolo is especially successful in defining her dual roles as Stine's no-nonsense, self-assured wife and the victimized nightclub singer Bobbi, whose blues number is a knockout.

Katherine Janicki, too, shows a nice distinction between her egotistical runaway Mallory and the insecure, dumb starlet Avril. Sarah Burley is assured and sympathetic as the stereotypical faithful, love-struck secretaries of Stine and Stone.

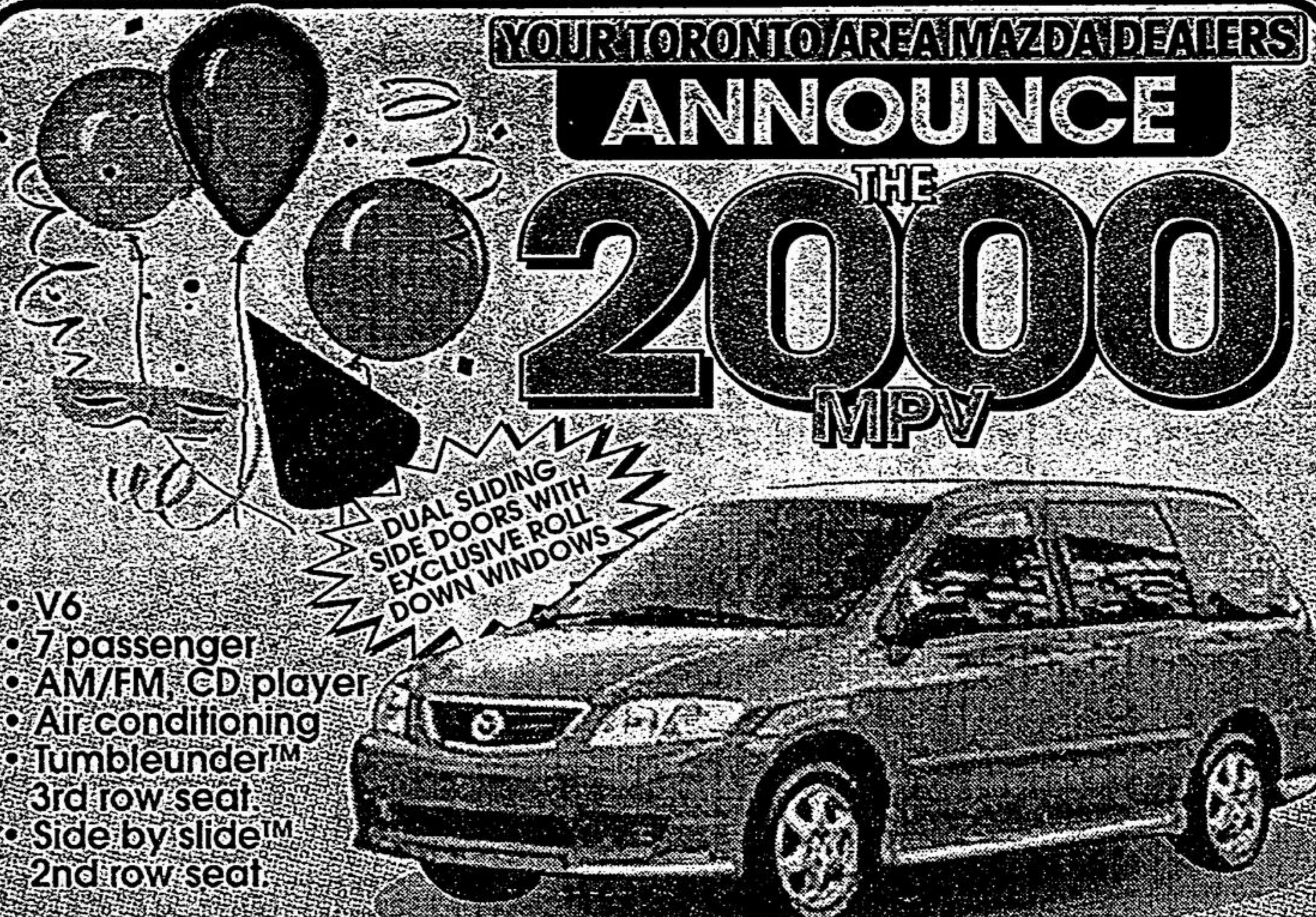
Jennifer Kee's fine sense of parody, particularly in her opening scene, stamps her gold-digging, tough-as-nails Mrs. Kingsley and her ultra-sophisticated Carla with authority.

Allowing for some over-light singing, Mark Tse's music direction was assured and in sympathy with the period. He got some good fun out of the swell of angel voices in the schmaltzy choral "score" of the party scene and some nice '40s-style close harmony from Jimmy Powers (Dan Roberts) and the Angel City Four.

These last were inappropriately costumed, but for the most part Hilary Whitebread dressed the large cast in the spirit of the times.

The show was produced by Jennifer Kowalyk-Pieterse, (a gargantuan job) and stage-managed by Frances Kulis who, along with Hawco, MYT president Jeff Jones (the hood and the cop) and BJ Everhart are leaving the company this year.

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