

Will the Real Anastasia Please Stand Up?

By: Ariella Green

Over a hundred years ago, in present day Russia, the Bolshevik army, with Lenin's enthusiasm, assassinated Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and his family to put an end to the Romanov dynasty. The musical *Anastasia* is inspired by the motion picture of the same name from 1997. Both renditions are based on how life would have been if young Anastasia survived the assassination and reunited with her Nana, the Dowager Empress. *Anastasia* the musical was written by playwright Terrence McNally with music by Steven Flaherty and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens. The actors from *Anastasia the Musical* will be performing at the Alexander W. Dreyfoos Hall at the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts between the 9th-13th of March. I paid a visit to see the Romanov family on March 9th. *Anastasia* tells the story of Anya, who suffers from amnesia, discovering who she is with the help of her love interest Dmitry and his friend Vlad. This beautiful conspiracy will send shivers down your spine while rooting for Anya to remember what happened "Once upon a December".

Casting Director Jason Styres picked actors that had an understanding of the life people lived under Lenin's rule. In St. Petersburg, the ensemble had terrible lives, but they showed that they had hope that Anastasia Romanov would save them. All of the ensembles' demeanors completely changed when Anya (Kyla Stone), Dmitry (Sam McLellan), and Vlad (Bryan Seastrom) escaped Russia to Paris to meet the Dowager Empress (Gerri Weagraff). The most chilling number of the performance was "The Last Dance of the Romanovs," which included the entire ensemble. The night started out as a grand party of the entire cast dancing in delight. The night turned into one of destruction which emanated throughout the theater. I found myself panicking as I heard the loud cracks of glass, red fire swallowing up the mansion, and the family running to safety to try and save themselves. Kyla Stone captured Anya's strength after living through the pain of being an orphan for as long as she could remember. Stone shows that in spite of it all, Anya never lost hope, especially in the song "Journey to the Past". Stone sings with clarity and kindness. Sam McLellan as Dmitry underwent many changes throughout the show. He started out using Anya to get his hands on the reward from the Dowager Empress, but the audience felt the connection brewing between McLellan and Stone as soon as they danced together. Bryan Seastrom showed how positive and fun Vlad is, especially when they teach Anya how to be Anastasia ("Learn to Do it"). Gerri Weagraff played the loving grandmother so well that the audience was able to feel Weagraff's heartbrokenness and the pain in her voice when she lost her family. Madeline Raube as Countess Lily had a strong stage presence and was hilarious to watch. Raube and Seastrom had great chemistry together as forbidden lovers. Gleb was played by Brandon Delgado and he showed that he truly cared for Anya because he warned her to not take on the danger of becoming Anastasia. Delgado showed how hard Gleb's life was in his father's shadow, ultimately deciding to become nothing like his father.

The set of *Anastasia* was designed by Alexander Dodge and was unlike any musical I have seen because of the projection designs which were done by Aaron Rhyne. There were three projections; one upstage and two on either side of the stage. The timing of the transitions were done so smoothly that it made the show come to life. The projections gave the musical a modern spin in a way because of how animated and colorful they were. Lighting designer Donald Holder lit up the stage with the beautiful gel colors he designed. I particularly liked the flashing lights to symbolize that a photograph was being taken in certain scenes. The costumes were designed by Linda Cho and perfectly matched the characters lived in. The Romanovs' costumes showed how prominent and wealthy they were. From my seat, I noticed just how sparkly Tsarina Alexandra's costume was. Cho's designs were able to show how filthy the poor people of St. Petersburg were. Once Act II began, everyone's costume became more colorful and beautiful because they were in the city of Paris. Sound Designer Peter Hylenski added to the realism of the story with his sound effects from the cracks of glass, the winding up of the music box, and the noises from the train ride. The choreography was done by Bill Burns and stayed true to the time period and setting of the musical. I loved how many of the dances included partners. The best dance number was "Quartet at the Ballet" because of how beautiful the ballet dancers were on their feet. They moved with such ease. The orchestra was led by conductor Jeremy Robin Lyons and their notes echoed throughout the theater. The music made the show as dramatic as it was. Under Director Sarah Hartmann, the show was a smashing success. One of my favorite modern inclusions from the show was the "Bend and Snap" idea from *Legally Blonde*. Lilly had "dropped" something by Vlad and proceeded to pick it up as a way to get his attention (she got it alright).

Anastasia the musical is an informal story about life in the early 1900s for people in Russia compared to other parts of Europe. The musical gives Anastasia Romanov a much deserved ending than the one she got. Luckily, you do not have to travel back in time to visit the Romanov family because tickets are available for purchase at the Kravis Center box office and at [Kravis.org](https://anastasiathemusical.com/tour/). In case you can not make the Palm Beach performances, the company is on tour and information is available at <https://anastasiathemusical.com/tour/>