

## > FIRST NIGHT FAME: THE MUSICAL



CLASS ACT: Cast of *Fame: The Musical*

### Talent will out

Grand Canal Theatre  
 >BY CHRIS WASSER

"I'm gonna live forever," sings 'Carmen Diaz'; the feisty yet troubled city girl determined to see her name up in lights.

Of course, much like the rest of her equally ambitious classmates, we all know she probably won't, but it's in that remarkable journey from freshman year right up until graduation day at New York City's High School of Performing Arts that we discover how each and every one of them intend on giving it a shot.

Ah yes, eight months in the making (if we're to go by producer Robert C Kelly's documented search for the perfect 'Nick' and 'Serena'), *Fame: The*

*Musical* finally made it's way to the big stage last night.

Some came for the songs, others the dancing, but there's little doubting the fact that all eyes were on its leading stars; the winners of RTE's televised talent show, Ben Morris and Jessica Cervi. How in the name of holy musical theatre would this pair live up to the hype that's surrounded the project from day one? Uh, quite well, actually.

Indeed, surrounded by a gang of aspiring young actors, dancers, and musicians, both 'Nick' and 'Serena' arrive at the oh-so trendy "PA" ready to take on the world. They're not the only ones, either; Tyrone (Taofique Folarin) is quite the dancer – so too is the aforementioned Carmen (Brittany Woodrow). And let's not forget about frisky Spanish student Joe Vegas (James Alexander Gibbs), whose one-track mind often distracts him from his craft.

Bands are formed, relationships ensue, and hearts are broken. Oh, and did I mention that the teachers at this school really care for their students? In theory, it's all about "hard work" and keeping the grades up (Miss Esther Sherman, played by former Three Degrees lead singer Sheila Ferguson, is particularly strict), but in between breaking into song and dance at the drop of a hat, these guys are just looking out for each other.

#### OVERBLOWN

It can all get quite serious, too: Tyrone can't read, Serena thinks Nick is gay, and Carmen (literally) can't keep her nose out of trouble. Sound complicated? It isn't really – just a tad overblown and dramatic. Still, what matters is that it's entertaining, and while that might have a lot to do with the skilled team behind all those carefully choreo-

graphed routines and numbers, a lot of what makes *Fame: The Musical* such a memorable experience for its audience lies within the gifted talent of its brilliantly assembled cast.

The songs – bar one, of course – might not be the greatest I've ever heard, but that doesn't stop the likes of Morris, Folarin, and a brilliant Yemie Sonuga (who plays dancer Mabel) from delivering some truly wonderful performances, especially Jessica Cervi, whose outstanding turn as the innocent yet confident Serena counts as a definite highlight.

It may only take two hours to get through four years of school, but it's both the humour and sharpness of the script, as well as the exuberant charisma of its players, that keeps this show ticking along just fine.

The "hard work" paid off, guys, and from where I'm sitting, it's a job well done indeed.