



www.BendintheRoadMusical.com

Synopsis:



BEND IN THE ROAD: The Anne of Green Gables Musical is a fun and heartwarming family comedy based on the beloved classic novel, *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery. *BEND IN THE ROAD* tells the story of young Anne Shirley, an orphan, who is mistakenly adopted by Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert to help them on their Avonlea farm. Anne's intelligent, joyous and imaginative ways change the lives of all those around her in this small town. Anne finds fast friendships at school and a rivalry with classmate Gilbert Blythe turns complicated as they grow up.

Development History:

2012 – Sold Out, extend 5-week workshop at the **Carrie Hamilton Theatre at the Pasadena Playhouse**.
2013 – Sold out, extended run at the **New York Musical Theatre Festival**.
2016 – Readings at **3D Theatricals** and the **Zephyr Theatre**.
2017 – Reading at **Universal City** for NAMT Spring attendees.
2017 – Sold Out Staged Reading and Workshop at **Children's Theatre of Charlotte**.
2019 – Reading at **Glendale Center Theatre**.
2020 – OnStage Virtual Performance at **Children's Theater of Charlotte**.
2021 UPCOMING – Northwest Premiere at **Kitsap Forest Theatre**.

A Few things to know:

– *BEND IN THE ROAD* is based on the beloved classic *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery. *Anne of Green Gables* has sold more than 50 million copies and has been translated into 20 languages. Numerous best-selling sequels followed by author L. M. Montgomery.

– *BEND IN THE ROAD* is a high-energy, family friendly musical-comedy perfect for all ages.

– *BEND IN THE ROAD* themes of finding a home, the power of imagination, the challenges of growing and empowerment of young women to be intelligent and independent resonate with audiences from all walks of life.

– Co-writer Benita Scheckel is an award-winning teacher, principal and music educator. *BEND IN THE ROAD* has several built-in educational components that would work perfectly for any theater's educational and community outreach. A teacher's Study Guide is available.



The Anne Of Green Gables Musical

The Characters:

9 women / 5 men – ensemble may be expanded

Anne Shirley	(playing 12 - 17. Mezzo, red hair and freckles)
Marilla Cuthbert	(40 - 60 years old, Mezzo, graying hair)
Matthew Cuthbert	(40 - 60 years old, Baritone, weathered)
Rachel Lynde	(40 – 60 years old, Mezzo, elegant)
Diana Barry	(15 - 18, Soprano, dark curly hair, sweet)
Gilbert Blythe/Soldier	(playing 15 - 18, Tenor, incredibly handsome)
Minnie Mae/Ensemble	(playing 5 – 10 years old)
Mrs. Camille Barry/Ensemble	(mid-30s, Mezzo, dark hair)
Teddy Phillips/Stationmaster	(19 – 29 years old, nervous and nerdy)
Josie Pye/Wife	(playing 13 – 18, Soprano, very pretty, blonde)
Charlie Sloan/Salesman #1	(playing 16 – 20 years old, Tenor)
Billy Andrews/Salesman #2	(playing 16 – 20 years old, Tenor)
Prissy Andrews/Ensemble	(playing 12 – 17, Mezzo)
Ruby Gillis/Ensemble	(playing 13 – 18, Mezzo)

Bend in the Road can be done with as few as 14 cast members or filled with more ensemble cast members of all ages.

The Setting:

Prince Edward Island, Canada. Time: 1896 to 1901.

The action takes place in the town of Avonlea over five years in the life of Anne Shirley.

Musical Numbers:

1. A Home For Me	Anne & Company
2. Anne with E	Anne (& Matthew)
3. Rachel's Surprise	Rachel & Marilla
4. The Lord's Prayer	Anne and Marilla
5. Walk Like Sisters (Kindred Spirits)	Anne & Diana
6. Math and Mayhem	The school kids
7. That Girl	Marilla & Matthew
8. The Feud	Marilla, Rachel & Mrs. Barry
9. Trouble is Trouble	Matthew & Anne
10. What Do You Call a Boy/Girl?	Josie, Gilbert and the school kids
11. That Girl (Reprise)	Gilbert
12. I Could Have Gone Alone	Anne & Gilbert
13. The Haunted Wood	(Instrumental, Ensemble Dance)
14. One Little Drop	Matthew & Anne
15. The Bend in the Road	Anne & Gilbert & Company



The Anne Of Green Gables Musical



Benita Scheckel (Book / Lyrics)

Benita Scheckel is a San Gabriel Valley native, growing up in Alhambra and making Pasadena her home. After attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, Benita toured with an opera company and performed musical improv at the Ice House in Pasadena. Some of her stage credits include *Camelot*, *Into the Woods*, *Evita*, *Music Man*, *The Secret Garden* and *Oklahoma*. TV work includes *Miracles* and voiceover work on Disney Channel's hit show, *Phineas and Ferb*. Ms. Scheckel started directing and producing in 2003 for local philanthropic organizations and in 2007 began her career as a director and educator in the Pasadena Unified School District working with middle and high school students at Blair School. She has been honored for her work with children and has been recognized by the PUSD Special Education Department for her particular knack of including students with special needs both physical and emotional into performing arts programs. Benita is Principal of Altadena Arts Magnet School.



Michael Upward (Music / Lyrics)

Michael Upward is a composer, pianist and musical director with a Master of Arts degree in Music Composition. He has written a Requiem Mass for chorus, soloists and orchestra and over 50 choral compositions currently performed throughout the U.S. In addition to *Bend in the Road*, Michael has written three other full-length musicals including *Detention! The Musical*, for young voices. He wrote two Nutrition Education musicals for Network for a Healthy California, performed hundreds of times a year in school districts across Southern California.

In addition to composing, Michael is a musical director, having directed such shows as *The Fantasticks*, *Guys & Dolls*, *Evita*, *Nunsense II*, and *Quilters*, for which he won the an award for Best Musical Direction. Michael is a voter for the Los Angeles Ovation Theater Awards and currently the Contemporary Music Director at two Catholic Churches in Southern California. You may find out more about his music at www.michaelupward.com.

FOR MORE INFO OR FOR LICENSING, PLEASE CONTACT THE PRODUCERS:

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REVIEWS ---

Upstage Downstage

'Bend in the Road': A Polished Production of A Musical With Heart at NYMF

The story of Anne Shirley, the heroine of Lucy Maud Montgomery's classic 1908 novel *Anne of Green Gables*, is a sprawling tale that is difficult to condense into the time constraints of a musical theater production. So much credit must go to Benita Sheckel and Michael Upward, the creative team behind **Bend in the Road**, which does just that and gives us the most polished of the productions I've seen at this year's New York Music Theatre Festival (NYMF).

Ms. Scheckel (book and lyrics) and Mr. Upward (music and lyrics) may have had to sacrifice the character development that came out so splendidly in the 1985 film, with its indelible performances by Megan Follows as Anne, Colleen Dewhurst as Marilla, and Richard Farnsworth as Matthew. But they have captured the key plot elements and, more importantly, they have retained the heart of this most emotionally rewarding of stories.

Ms. Scheckel has done a wonderful job of bringing out Anne's indomitable spirit, and Mr. Upward has written one lovely song after the next, often infused with beautiful choral work. The best of these include a touching setting of "The Lord's Prayer;" the ode to friendship titled "Walk Like Sisters" (though it surely should be renamed "Kindred Spirits"); and "One Little Drop," sung by Matthew as he dances with Anne, looking all grown up in the new dress he has bought for her.



Though presented with minimal sets (cleverly designed by Lauren Helpert), the production is greatly enhanced by lovely watercolor-

hued video projections by Andrew Lazarow, and costumes by David Kaley.

All of the cast members, under the direction of Benjamin Endsley Klein (**Ann** on Broadway) give excellent performances, with special nods to Alison Woods as Anne, Whitney Winfield as Anne's closest friend Diana, and Martin Vidnovic and Anne Kanengeiser as Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, the brother and sister whose lives are so deeply enriched after the error that led Anne to come live with them.

Bend in the Road is an outstanding entry into the NYMF festival and delightful family fare. It is sure to have a long life and receive a great reception wherever its journey takes it.

Theater: Huffington Post

by Michael Giltz **NYMF: BEND IN THE ROAD** *** 1/2

Anne Of Green Gables and the many sequels that followed are a beloved series of books by Lucy Maud Montgomery. (Is there any other way to describe them other than "beloved"? Well, after one or two fall into a formula -- Anne comes to new town and with her plucky spirit brings lovers together, opens up closed hearts and wins everyone over -- they built on the original's freshness by following its heroine through life in a sweet, unaffected manner.)

The story of talkative little orphan Anne Shirley who comes to the rural town of Prince Edward Island has been adapted into feature films, TV movies, a classic TV series, animated movies, stage plays and of course numerous musicals. One musical version is staged



every year in Canada and toured the world, including briefly the West End. I can't speak to it since I've never seen it or heard the

cast album. But I'm certain few versions have so successfully captured the charms of the original the way *Bend In The Road* already does. With some refinements, it surely deserves to make its way to Broadway, the home of girl-friendly musicals.

And if they're very lucky, it will happen soon enough so that Alison Woods can play Anne. This young actress has a lovely singing voice and sets just the right tone as the hyper-imaginative, stubborn, but essentially adorable Anne with an "e." But kudos to the casting of Michael Cassara, who has surrounded her with talented performers just right for this show.

Take the crucial first scene where we really get to know Anne. She's just been dropped off by train from an orphanage. It's a bit of a screw-up: brother and sister Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert "ordered" a boy to help them on the farm and suddenly here is this red-headed little girl. Of course they have to take her home for the night and Matthew (Martin Vidnovic) and Anne make the buggy ride home to Green Gables while singing "Anne With An E." Matthew is overwhelmed by Anne's non-stop chatter -- he's a farmer, a man of few words who sinks into pleasant silence for hours at a time, one imagines. Anne is all-abuzz; what's this? What's that? Though Matthew says virtually nothing through the ride, we see him looking abashed, bemused and slowly falling hard for the charms of this willful child. It's a beautiful piece of acting and crucial to establishing Anne's character.

He's matched by Woods, who never overplays Anne, never going for humor but letting it flow naturally out of her passionate exclamations. Here in one well-crafted scene (the book is by Benita Scheckel, the music by Michael Upward and they both wrote the lyrics) you get to the heart of the books and what makes them so enduring.



Director Benjamin Endsley Klein is in full control throughout, aided by strong tech work, including the scenic design of Lauren Helpern, costumes by David Kaley, lighting by Joel E. Silver and sound by A&L Sound Partners.

Maureen Silliman shines as the busybody neighbor Rachel Lynde. (The actress's name couldn't be better for playing this character.) Her pushy ways keep Marilla (Anne Kanengeiser) from following her head and instead giving in to her heart. Before you know it, Anne is ensconced at Green Gables and having adventures, whether it's making a new best friend with Diana (Whitney Winfield) or sparring with Gilbert (a very appealing CJ Pawlikowski), the smartest, most handsome boy in school.

Strong moments abound. Kanengeiser as Marilla is perhaps the most crucial casting outside of Anne and she too is pitch perfect, whether making a cutting remark, trying to remain stern while amused by Anne's outbursts or teaching the child how to pray (a lovely musical setting for "The Lord's Prayer"). Winfield is a good counterbalance as Anne's friend and Pawlikowski makes their transition from rivals to friends to potential lovers perfectly believable. Of course front and center is Woods as Anne and she's a delight, singing beautifully, behaving spunkily and always keeping Anne real. She mines the humor without ever reaching for it and that makes all the difference.

A late spooky scene and song "The Haunted Wood" is especially well-staged. It somehow creates a scary, affecting moment with just a little lighting, some effective music and having the cast onstage standing in two lines with their backs to the audience while Anne lets her over-active imagination scare her for real. It's pure theater, with no need for elaborate effects to achieve its goal. Indeed, *Bend In The Road* would be most welcome on Broadway for its lack of smoke and mirrors, not to mention a sweet nature that is heart-warming without being simplistic or treacly. Wholesome doesn't have to mean dumb.

The Write Teachers

"Bend in the Road" at the New York Musical Theatre Festival at the PTC

Performance Space

When I first heard that [Benjamin Endsley Klein](#) was directing *Bend in the Road* at the [New York Musical Theatre Festival](#), I knew that it was one of the shows that I had to see. If you saw *Ann*, you know exactly what I'm talking about. (If you didn't, well, that's a shame – you absolutely missed out.)

Now, in *Bend in the Road*, Benjamin Endsley seamlessly moves the story of Anne of Green Gables from the page to the stage – as the play, the transitions, the pacing was utter perfection.



But, let me back it up a bit. For those of you who don't know, *Bend in the Road*, written by Benita Scheckel and Michael Upward, is based on the classic novel *Anne of Green Gables* and centers on young Anne Shirley, an orphan who is mistakenly adopted by siblings Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert. Although they had hoped for a boy to help with their Avonlea farm, Anne's

joyous, intelligent, and vivacious spirit changes the lives of all those around her, including Matthew, Marilla, and the nosy town gossip Mrs. Rachel Lynde. Anne finds fast friendships at school with Diana Barry, while her rivalry with handsome classmate Gilbert Blythe changes unexpectedly as they enter adulthood. I was absolutely delighted with this show, from the story to the cast, to the set – I nearly forgot that it was ninety-five degrees and I was sitting in a poorly air-conditioned theater. The cast, crew, and creative team were that committed, that energetic, and that engaging. So, BRAVO to Jordan Barrow, Mimi Bessette, Brandon Essig, Kasie Gasparini, Justine Huxley, Anne Kanengeiser, Kevon Ligon, CJ Pawlikowski, Maureen Sillman, Chelsea Stavis, Martin Vidnovic, Rachel Weintraub, Whitney Winfield, and Alison Woods. But, as always, I have favorite moments...

First would be the trio of early nineteen hundred *Mean Girls*; led by Josie Pye, played by the flawless Kasie Gasparini, the trio of Prissy (Justine Huxley), Ruby Gillis (Chelsea Stavis) and Josie Pye add an element of playful humor coupled with the nastiness of teenagers to this story. The three work beautifully as a symbiotic trio, and I kid you not, they are reminiscent of Rachel McAdams and her clan in *Mean Girls*. They made my teacher brain work in overtime, as they did an expert job of portraying how mean and catty teenagers can be to one another, no matter if it's 1901 or 2001 – teenagers can be cruel. Their scenes alone could open an unending amount of discussion and conversation should this production ever visit schools, colleges, and/or community theaters.

I think every town has a Rachel Linde, (Maureen Silliman). There's always a busybody, a gossip, someone who means well and yet always manages to stick his/her foot in their mouth. In *Bend in the Road*, Rachel is that person, and oh how she makes you laugh. It's a beautiful thing.

I adored the Matthew Cuthbert, (Martin Vidnovic). Adored. The quiet, methodical, loving character is the undercurrent that creates a family between Anne, Marilla, and himself. He is the thread that binds them, the constant force in their lives. For me, Matthew Cuthbert is one of the most endearing characters in the show.



The moments between Anne (Allison Woods) and Diana (Whitney Winfield) are absolutely flawless. ***Walk Like Sisters*** is definitely one of the best songs of this show. It's moving, catchy, and an absolutely beautiful duet between two friends. And this brings me to my next favorite...moment.

Allison Woods. If ***Anne of Green Gables*** ever came alive in your imagination when you poured over the pages as a youngster, she comes alive on the stage via Allison Woods. She is Anne of Green Gables. She is charismatic, energetic, heartfelt...I could use quite a lengthy list of adjectives here. I have found, that whether it is in film or theater, when one tries to recreate a character that has already existed within the pages of a book, well, there's trepidation. Hesitation. Anticipation. Concern. Will he or she be able to recreate the person that came alive in the imaginations of those who dove headfirst into the book? Will they be able to capture the essence of what already exists on the page, and transfer that into a performance?

In the case of Allison Woods, ***Anne of Green Gables***, and ***Bend in the Road***, the answer is a resounding YES. Like all shows that I love, I could gush on about them for forever. But, I'm going to stop now, and leave you with what you need to know.

It's a story that is set in 1901, over a HUNDRED YEARS AGO, and yet, it's absolutely fascinating to me that so much of the heart of the story still resonates with audiences today, as *Bend in the Road* explores themes and values that transcend time. Family. Home. Love. Friendship. These are things that are being cherished in Green Gables, are cherished now, in 2013, and will continue to be the elements in life that matter most. ***Bend in the Road*** reminds us of the intangible elements that matter most in life, the ones that money cannot buy, the things that are, and will always be, invaluable.

Letters from the Mezzanine

BEND IN THE ROAD

There's another little orphan with red hair and a similar name singing and dancing in a show a few blocks northeast of the PTC Performance Space. But *Bend in the Road's* source material isn't a comic strip. Instead, writers Benita Scheckel (book & lyrics) and Michael Upward (music & lyrics) take on the classic children's book series *Anne of Green Gables*.

Bend in the Road follows Anne Shirley, an orphan who is adopted by middle-aged siblings Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert. The Cuthberts had expected a boy to help them on the farm, but Anne captivates the pair.

While living with the Cuthberts, Anne gets in (and out) of scrapes, makes friends in the town, and finds her place in the world.

I loved reading about Anne Shirley and her adventures in Prince Edward Island as a child, and equally I loved seeing Lucy Maud Montgomery's characters being brought to life. Anne Kanengeiser and Martin Vidnovic bring a wonderful sensibility to Marilla and Matthew, and the fourteen-person cast all handle their



parts with great aplomb. But a musical about Anne of Green Gables needs a strong Anne, and *Bend in the Road* has found it in Alison Woods, who carries the show on her small (but very capable shoulders). Woods, who resembles a younger Amy Adams in her speech (and overall adorableness), plays Anne as a real child and not as a caricature, while still imbuing her with a great deal of energy and precociousness.

Michael Upward's music captures the timeless essence of *Anne of Green Gables* in the tradition of "literary" musicals like *The Secret Garden* and *Little Women*. The lilting harmonies transport you to the countryside of Prince Edward Island and are a delight to listen to. I hope that *Bend in the Road* will continue to have audiences of all ages in future productions.

Favorite songs: "The Lord's Prayer," a song between Anne and Marilla that instantly put a smile to my face, and "Walk Like Sisters," a duet between Anne and her friend Diana.

JK's Theatre Scene

Bend in the Road (Grade: A-) After a mad dash back to midtown, we got into the first of two NYMF offerings, the family-friendly musical, ***Bend in the Road***, based on the classic novel, *Anne of Green Gables*. Those of you who read this blog regularly know that, generally, I hate the smarmy, too sweet for sugar trappings of "family-friendly" musicals. So it was more



than pleasant surprise that I loved this show from beginning to end. Sure, it wears its heart on its puffy sleeve, and it is so devoid of anything remotely dark. But it does so proudly, and most importantly, with a genuine sincerity that you can't help but be happy about. Hell Heck, I even got misty at the inevitably bittersweet ending!

The book (by **Benita Scheckel**) is fast-paced, and the music (by **Michael Upward**) and lyrics (by Scheckel and Upward) is bouncy, melodic and clever. Most of the numbers demand your attention in all the right ways. The terrific cast, directed by **Benjamin Endsley Klein**, really brings the



material to its best light. Lead by the strong, emotional core of performances by **Martin Vidnovic** and **Anne Kanengeiser**, and the dynamic, mesmerizing, star-making turn of **Alison Woods** as

Anne. Add some delightful turns by **Whitney Winfield**, **Maureen Silliman** and **CJ Pawlikowski** and this is a winning cast.

Being a NYMF production the production values only hint at

what could be, which puts the important part - the show itself - to the fore. And this one is a winner - one can imagine it getting the full, lavish Broadway treatment, and it being just as successful on a bare stage, being performed by children's theatre companies nationwide.

Usher Nonsense

BEND IN THE ROAD

Bend In The Road, the new family musical currently playing at The Pearl Theatre as part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival, is based on Canadian author Lucy Maud Montgomery's 1908 best-selling novel, ANNE OF GREEN GABLES, which to date has sold more than 50 million copies and been translated into 20 languages, as well as inspired numerous films, made-for-television (and even animated) movies, not to mention a number of plays and musicals, one of which has toured Canada every year since 1964. So, one is tempted to ask, why would anyone want to see yet another version of this familiar story?

Well, how about because it's just flat-out wonderful? The creative team behind *Bend In The Road* has come up with an excellent book and score and put together an extremely strong cast, and the director, Benjamin Endsley Klein, has treated the material with obvious respect and care. It is easy to see how, in the wrong hands, this sentimental story of a young orphaned girl who is mistakenly adopted by an aging brother-and-sister couple, could descend into either bathos or parody. Director Klein has wisely decided to take this material seriously and to play the story straight, and he has steered this marvelous company of actors into performances that never veer toward caricature. The result is a very believable and emotionally satisfying evening of theatre, I don't care how old you are.

Especially impressive are Anne Kanengeiser and Martin Vidnovic as the brother and sister (Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert); she is a completely grounded actress with a big, stern heart and a superb singing voice, and he delivers a solidly understated performance that grows in feeling as the evening progresses. Maureen Silliman, as the delicious town gossip Rachel Lynde (a part that is usually played as a mean old snoop) comes within

inches of stealing the show, but in a cast this strong that is just not possible. Mimi Bessette (Camille Barry), Whitney Winfield (Diana Barry), and Kevin Ligon and CJ Pawlikowski (in multiple roles) are giving standout performances, and there isn't a weak link elsewhere anywhere in the ensemble.



But there is no question this show rides on the very capable shoulders of the production's young star, making her New York stage debut. Alison Woods is simply delightful, perfectly cast and setting just the right tone as the imaginative, irrepressible Anne Shirley. She brings the novel's title character to wonderful, expressive life, and she sings like an angel.

The production elements perfectly support the efforts of the cast, from Lauren Helpern's fluid set to Joel E. Silver's lights and David Kaley's spot-on costumes. There is probably some extra fine-tuning still to be done; some of the music needs to be tailored more specifically to what is actually happening onstage, as some of the intro bridges go on for too long, and the staging, especially in the final scene when things become a little cluttered and somewhat static, can be improved, but I am hopeful that there is a rich future life ahead for this show, and that it's creators will take advantage of the opportunity to perfect this rewarding, promising material in anticipation of its next bend in the road. If you are thinking about seeing this show before it closes at The Pearl, I would strongly recommend that you bring a box of tissues, and a light and open heart.

David Roberts

"Bend in the Road" at the New York Musical Theatre Festival at the PTC

Reviewed by David Roberts

Theatre Reviews Limited

"Bend in the Road" is a delightful character-driven musical lifted from the framework of the classic 1908 novel "Anne of

BEND in the ROAD

the Green Gables” by Lucy Maud Montgomery. The musical - like those before it - closely follows the plot of the novel and includes all of the significant moments in Montgomery’s delightful story of Anne Shirley’s coming of age at Green Gables with adoptive parents Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert.

The action of the musical occurs primarily in Marilla’s kitchen, Anne’s bedroom, the schoolhouse and yard, Diana Berry’s home, and the “haunted” wood. Benita Scheckel and Michael Upward’s lyrics capture the spirit of the novel and their book and music bring life to the characters and their conflicts in honest and endearing ways.



Kudos to Anne Kanengeiser who uses her formidable craft to develop the character of Marilla from the doubtful adoptive parent, through the process of identification with Anne, to the place where Marilla realizes she is needed more as a mother who cares than a disciplinarian to a troubled child. Ms. Kanengeiser and Ms. Woods are the perfect team and they compliment one another’s performances with generosity and skill. And kudos to Martin Vidnovic who creates a vulnerable Matthew Cuthbert who knows how to “stand back” and let Marilla go to those places he knows in his heart she will go.

As the second act evolves, things fare less well for “Bend in the Road” which has been in process for over a year. Indeed, the musical staging throughout the second act, particularly from the final school yard/graduation scene, is lackluster at best. What should be the highlight of the musical

turns out to be dyads strewn across the stage in forced “conversation” as the cast attempts to bring resolution to the musicals important conflicts and feature Anne’s “Bend in the Road,” Gilbert’s confession, and Marilla’s decision to sell Green Gables. This act needs a few powerhouse duets between Marilla and Anne in addition to the plethora of ensemble numbers.

That said, “Bend in the Road” is a charming traditional musical, which appeals to a broad range of ages and has the potential for continued success. It serves as a significant extended metaphor for the importance of finding places where we are wanted and where we want to be, places where are needed and where we need to be, places where imagination blossoms and enervates the spirit. Be sure to see one of its remaining performances.

Life Upon the Sacred Stage

BEND IN THE ROAD by Retta Blaney

Watching *Bend in the Road*, a new musical based on *Anne of Green Gables*, I so much wished that as a child I had read the Lucy Maud Montgomery novel from which it is drawn. I fell in love with this story of Anne Shirley, an orphan who finds a home on Prince Edward Island, Canada, in 1896.



A selection of the New York Musical Theatre Festival's (NYMF) 2013 Next Link Project, the entire run sold out so quickly that NYMF added a performance. This is obviously a story cherished by many people, and it has been lovingly recreated by a cast of 14 under the direction of Benjamin Endsley Klein, who directed Ann last season on Broadway.

Alison Woods, making her New York stage debut, is delightful as the high-spirited redhaired orphan who is adopted by middle-aged siblings Marilla (Anne Kanengeiser) and Matthew Cuthbert (Martin Vidnovic). (It seems plucky, red-haired orphans are good subjects for musicals.

In the opening number, “A Home for Me,” Anne arrives by train from Nova Scotia to her new town bursting with joy at finally reaching “a place where

you're needed, a home." She has already become well-known to her fellow passengers with her nonstop talking and soon begins charming -- or annoying -- the town folks with her exuberance. Nick Potenzieri, associate director/musical staging, captures this well as all bustle about before the station.

When Matthew arrives in his horse and buggy, he is surprised to find a girl. He and his sister had hoped for a boy to help with their farm. But as you will suspect, Anne's intelligent and vivacious spirit wins over the Cuthberts and everyone else in town, including the nosy town gossip, Mrs. Rachel Lynde (Maureen Silliman).

Right from the start Anne, who has a vivid imagination as well as a temper, knows she's where she was meant to be. "It's the first thing I've seen that couldn't be improved by my imagination," she declares of Prince Edward Island.

In no time she finds a best friend in Diana Berry (Whitney Winfield, right), a neighbor, and they employ their imaginations to conjure up danger and treasures as they walk through the woods together to school. "We'll be kindred spirits till the end of time," they promise. Anne's impulsiveness gets her into more than a little trouble, but as she tells Marilla, "I never make the same mistake twice." To which Marilla replies: "I don't know that's much benefit as you're always making new ones."



Matthew explains to her in “Trouble is Trouble” how to make the best of difficulties. “To get through the darkness, there’s only one route. Face what’s really there, then walk yourself out.”

The songs (lyrics by Benita Scheckel and Michael Upward; music by Upward) offer that kind of welcome simplicity and optimism and serve the storytelling well. (Scheckel also wrote the book.) Andrew Gerle directs the five-piece orchestra.

Set designer Lauren Helpert convincingly creates Anne’s world with just a few props and Andrew Lazarow’s video and projection designs. David Kaley captures the period in his charming costumes. Excellent work also by Joe E. Silver with his lighting.

Bend in the Road (the title refers to changes one must face in life) received unanimous rave reviews in its 2012 premiere at the Carrie Hamilton Theatre at the Pasadena Playhouse. It recently played for six performances at PTC Performance Space as part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival, the largest annual musical theatre event in the world, which presents 30 productions each summer in the heart of the Theatre District, along with an array of readings, concerts, and other special events. It’s been called the Sundance of Musical Theatre and is a highlight of summer for many of us.

The young woman sitting next to me for *Bend* was spellbound throughout the first act.

When we talked at intermission, she said she had read the book as a girl and seen a PBS mini-series of it. She had forgotten many of the details, but said they were coming back to her as she watched. She thought the musical version was wonderful. And so did I.

The Producer's Perspective

5 Shows that Stand Out at the NYMF – 2013 by KEN DAVENPORT



The 10th Anniversary of the New York Musical Theatre Festival is upon us!

We get a lot of invites to NYMF shows. And every year, before the start of the season, I take a gander at the

shows featured in the festival catalog and pick the five shows that stand out. Reminder – these aren't the five shows that are necessarily the best – these are the five shows that for whatever reason (and I'll explain that reason below) get me (and potential other audience members or producers) excited about learning more. Take a look at last year's to see what I mean.

Alright, let's get to the five. Here they are, in no particular order (wait, that's a lie – they are in alpha order):

1. *Bend In the Road*

The first eight words in the *Bend* blurb are, "The beloved literary classic, *Anne of Green Gables* . . . "

Nothing sets a musical off in the right direction better than good strong source material with a good solid brand. The Producers of *Bend* knew that was going to be their selling point, and since the title of the musical wasn't *Anne of Green Gables* (which I kind of wonder why), they smartly led with it in their description.

Another four words in the first sentence that got me? ". . . for the whole family." Family musicals (which I define as appealing to both the young folk and the adults – not just one or the other) are in, so *Bend* has a big potential market.

"A masterpiece production" -Yahoo

"One may be watching the birth of a hit." -Stage Struck Review

"Funny,
thoughtful,
and quite
true to it's
source"
-Lauri's List

**4 Broadway World Nominations,
including Best Musical!**



"(Allison)
Woods is
delightful
as the
percocious
young
heroine!"
-Musicals
in LA

"An invitingly
charming
production
for all ages!"
-Arts in LA

DENN in **DENN** the **ROAD**

A new musical based on Anne of Green Gables
Written by Benita Scheckel and Michael Upward



Yahoo Review

by **Randall Gray** - The California Theatre Critic - [Yahoo](#) International

Bend In The Road: A Theatrical Review

What could be more charming than a beautiful musical about an orphaned girl who finally finds a family and a town to belong in? How much more touching could it be if this delightful young lady also finds a life, a love, a friend, and joy while bringing all of the same to those that she encounters? This is Bend In The Road, a delightful new musical based on Anne of Green Gables written by Benita Scheckel and Michael Upward, currently playing at the Carrie Hamilton Theatre, which is the upstairs theatre of the Pasadena Playhouse.

This intelligent and enjoyable production is offered in one of the best theatrical spaces available in the area, and matches the charm of the Pasadena area from start to finish. I was blessed to be present for a preview showing of this musical and found myself entranced and connected to the story as I never have before. Benita Scheckel, who is also the director of this production, and Michael Upward, who is also the musical director of this production should be very pleased with themselves. Together they have created a masterpiece production that is sure to endure time and become a well-loved masterpiece. The casting was also phenomenal. Though there was not a single performer who in any way seemed lacking, my spotlight has to be shared by four different performers. Kate Sullivan, who portrays Camille Barry, is not on the stage long, but she brings a poise and presence to it that forces the audience to watch her every move. Melinda Porto, who portrays Diana Barry is simply delightful to watch, and with her loveliness and delightful voice, a joy to experience. Alison Woods, who portrays the productions leading role of Anne

Shirley is superior, with a voice that comes from heaven, a stage presence that commands attention, and a smile that warms the heart. Finally, Christopher Higgins, who portrays Gilbert, simply steals the production. I have been blessed to review this young man once before when he performed in *The Bedroom Window* at the Odyssey Theater, and watching him in this very different role convinces me that this young man has the acting talents to go as far as he desires to. Well done everyone!

The story is simplistic and classic. It's the late 1800's, and a young girl is sent from an orphanage by train to an unknown town and an unknown family. Brother Don Margolin as Matthew Cuthbert and sister Christopher Callen as Marilla Cuthbert (both who are also excellent performers) are expecting a boy but get a young vivacious and talkative girl with enough imagination to get her through anything, and enough love for others to help her deal with everything. This is an unexpected surprise by the Cuthbert's, but young Anne soon wins them over and neither of them could imagine their lives without her. She quickly befriends Diana Barry, a neighbor (see comment above), and finds in her the sister she has always longed for; someone who not only understands her and the way she feels about things, but also validates her personal value as a person. Her education is something more difficult for Anne, but in the end she winds up being the only girl the key boy - the boy all the other girls are crazy about - falls for. Though performed in an expeditious fashion, not giving the entirety of the story from the book, the audience is able to receive the key elements of the story line and fall in love with the production as quickly as they did the book. Simply put, this production is a must see for those who have ever had, ever loved, or ever wanted to have and love a child.

This is a production you truly do not want to miss. Enjoy!

“Bend in the Road” – The new musical at the Carrie Hamilton aims in the right direction
by Frances Baum Nicholson



L to R: Justine Huxley, Christopher Higgins, Alison Woods, Kailey Swanson, Mariella D’Avirro, as Anne arrives in Avonlea in “Bend in the Road” (photo by Chris Ellis)

Long ago I knew a woman who spent her youth working as an usher at the theater in

Boston where an enormous number of now-famous Broadway musicals conducted their “out of town try-outs.” She used to tell fascinating stories about what these great works looked like when they were newborns, and how they changed during their run at that theater. Indeed, I also grew up with similar tales told by an original chorus member of “My Fair Lady.” Fascinating to consider such a thing in its stage of growing pains.

Now a brand new musical with much to recommend it has surfaced upstairs at the

Pasadena Playhouse. There, in the Carrie Hamilton Theatre, one may meet “Bend in the Road,” a musical by Benita Scheckel and Michael Upward based upon the classic novel “Anne of Green Gables.” There are a few evidences of

the same growing pains referred to above, but by and large this production shows great promise. One may be watching the birth of a hit.

The tale is the classic heart-warmer. An earnest and somewhat headstrong orphan girl lands at the door of two older, unmarried siblings who raise her. She develops a fast and enduring friendship with a neighbor girl, and goes head-to-head with the smartest boy in her one-room schoolhouse. As she grows and learns to be a part of her community, her essential good-heartedness rubs off on those around her – even the crusty, nosy widowwoman nearby who initially works to ruin her.

And all this potentially gooey stuff works in “Bend in the Road” due to a crisp script, taut direction, attractively on-point songs and an impressive lead. Indeed, it is the tinge of mischief and obstinacy in Alison Woods’ Anne which energizes the entire piece. This Anne operates from a sure conviction of her own rightness even when she’s not. You see it in her eyes, and that gives the piece teeth.

The songs also stand out. They are hummable, and some have considerable power. Indeed, I’d put “Kindred Spirits,” the song uniting Anne and her best buddy

Diana, right up there with “For

Good,” the signature song of the massive hit “Wicked.” It has a similar quality of both topicality and universality, and a similar pop-catchiness. Only one piece, the last before intermission, needs real work. Overly complex, it is an attempted fugue which becomes dissonant and somewhat unintelligible instead. Otherwise, it’s quite a score.

This is enhanced by a fine ensemble, who give heart and intensity to the music, and create details within the town in which Anne grows up.

Christopher Callen warms to her work as Marilla Cuthbert, the woman who takes Anne in, though her vocal quality sometimes hints at flatness. Don Margolin provides the necessary warmth as Marilla’s soft-hearted brother.

Barbara Niles finds a nice balance of heartache and self-righteousness as the snippy neighbor.



Add to these Melinda Porto's charming Diana, and Christopher Higgins as the increasingly interesting and youthfully handsome Gilbert, add in a bevy of amusingly snippy school girls and bouncy boys, and you have a cheerful frame for the story.

As for staging, under Scheckel's direction there is an attractive flow to the thing. Though very low-tech, this episodic tale is set in such a way that it moves from scene to scene with precision and energy, so the story never slows. The tiny stage is full, but not crowded, in part because everyone onstage is there with intentionality: they all have something to do, and someone to be.

Projected scenes using artwork by Anna Scheckel provide an effective essential set, along with quick-moving panels which cover the multitude of necessary locations. Indeed, only a roof-walking scene, worked out behind the projection scrim, is comparatively ineffective. The projector itself is seated too high, so the glow from its bulb, rather than aiming above the audience's heads, hits some audience members in central seats right in the eyeball. Yet, these are easy to fix.

Past such nitpicky details, "Bend in the Road" works. The story is sweet, but not saccharine. The music proves catchy and interesting. Kevin Lee's choreography feels organic to the time and characters. There is a cohesive vision at work here, and it shows. This just might be Broadway the old fashioned way: a tuneful show with endearing characters and a touching ending that will send you out smiling into the night. It is neither cutting edge, nor deep social commentary, but satisfying nonetheless. A little nip and tuck, and it may be ready for bigger things.

What: "Bend in the Road" When: Through October 7, 1 p.m. and 7p.m.
Saturdays and 1

p.m. Sundays Where: The Carrie Hamilton Theatre upstairs at the Pasadena Playhouse, 39 S. El Molino Ave. in Pasadena How Much: \$25 general, \$20 children 12 and under Info: (626) 344-8846 or www.bendintheroadtickets.eventbrite.com

Bend in the Road

Carrie Hamilton Theatre

Reviewed by Dink O'Neal



Tyler Sheef, Cade Anderson, Ty Freedman, Christopher Higgins, Justine Huxley, Mariella D'Avirro, Kailey Swanson, and Zoe Berger-Davis Photo by Chris Ellis

Albert Einstein is credited with having said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” These words are certainly apropos when it comes to the title character of Lucy Maud Montgomery’s classic novel, *Anne of Green Gables*. Her tale of a redheaded orphan, Anne “with an E” Shirley, whose daydreams and creativity lead to adventures galore, is renowned for its appeal to audiences both young and old. Never was this more evident than in a recent standing room– only performance of this staged version. It’s an invitingly charming production for all ages, adapted by Benita Scheckel, who also directs the piece, and Michael Upward, whose original composition make this more a “play with music” than a traditional musical.

At the performance reviewed, Justine Huxley brought to life Montgomery’s sassy young heroine with an engaging impishness that immediately won over the mix of adult and child audience members. Ever spunky, but never annoying or off-putting, Huxley’s comic timing was complimented perfectly by her excellent vocal skills. In particular, “Walk Like Sisters”—featuring Huxley and Melinda Porto, playing Anne’s best friend, Diana Barry— is clearly the show’s most memorable tune. Faintly reminiscent of “For Good” from Stephen Schwartz’s score of “*Wicked*,” this duet soars melodically with

a lovely harmonic line that produces goose bumps. All in all, Huxley did a first rate job, so much so that it's hard to believe that she is the production's understudy.

Supporting roles in the show are handled expertly. As Anne's adoptive guardians, Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert, Christopher Callen and Don Margolin provide a sense of stability for their characters' teenage charge while grounding the production with a crucial reality. At one point, Callen, tempering mild exasperation with compassion, leads Anne through a touching rendition of Upward's version of "The Lord's Prayer." You could have heard a pin drop in the theatre.

Providing additional standout performances are James Jaeger as a curmudgeonly stationmaster and teacher Mr. Phillips, and Christopher Higgins as the schoolhouse heartthrob, Gilbert Blythe. And a doff of the hat to Barbara Niles for injecting comic relief with her role as Avonlea's town busybody, Rachel Lynde. She does a great job of bringing to life a bombastic character without crossing the line into caricature. In a musically challenging trio titled "The Feud," Niles joins Callen and Kate Sullivan, as Diana's mother, as they battle over what should be done about Anne's antics. It's a great ending to the show's first act.

At times, Act 2 feels a bit choppy as attempts are made to include as many of Montgomery's more memorable plot twists as possible. There's the tea party mix-up between currant wine and raspberry cordial, leaving Diana drunk as a skunk, as well as Anne's saving of Diana's younger sister, Minnie Mae, with a dose of Syrup of Ipecac. And who could forget Anne's walking the ridgepole on the roof of the schoolhouse?

As the production concludes with Anne's graduation and her subsequent promotion to the position of Avonlea's schoolteacher, one senses that Scheckel and Upward had their hands full paring Montgomery's 300-page tome down to a marketable running time. Still, the proceedings are wrapped up nicely with the cast singing the production's title song as Anne proclaims poet Robert Browning's well-known phrase, "God's in His heaven—All's right with the world."



SINGERPRENEUER BLOG/LAURI'S LIST

'Bend' brings nostalgic family fun to Pasadena

The show starts with a pre-recorded voice, that of **Rachel Lynde**, the busybody meddler who is one of the story's dominant supporting characters: with a stern warning not to interrupt the show with "new-fangled gadgets" or "noisy children", we're off, settling comfortably into the world of Avonlea. It's all in good fun, of course: the audience last weekend was plenty full of kiddos, and although they were pretty quiet, we didn't hear another peep of that sort through the fourth wall.

What we did get was a warm, funny and very savvy musical theater adaptation of one of the most beloved stories in children's literature. [Lucy Maud Montgomery](#)'s *Anne of Green Gables* books may be more than a century old, but they have sold more than 50 million copies to date, and still have a hardcore fan base, as [online fan clubs](#) and the tourism board for [Prince Edward Island](#) will attest. Set in turn-of-the-century Nova Scotia, this quirky, engaging tale is hard to resist, even with all of the innocence and sweetness that could seem aggressively quaint to modern ears. **Anne Shirley**, an almost painfully precocious redheaded preteen, is an orphan who has spent most of her life in what we now call "the system", bounced from orphanage to foster home and back again, more times than she can count. She finds herself summoned to a farm by an aging brother and sister, and although her fate is fairly uncertain, she proceeds to charm the community, one crusty soul at a time.

The key to any telling of this story is in the portrayal of Anne, not only because she is the protagonist, but because it is a surprisingly complex character, defying many long-treasured literary stereotypes: Anne is sweet, but far from dim; always in trouble, but not trouble itself; beautiful, but not a



classic beauty — her attractiveness lies first in her magnetism. This dimensionality makes her wideeyed enthusiasm fascinating, rather than cloying: just when you think you have her figured out, it's hard to get a handle on her again. Both the show, coauthored **Benita Scheckel** and **Michael Upward**, and the lead, played by the astonishing **Alison Woods**, are fully up to the task. In general, the characters are rich and charismatic, and the music is beautifully sung, particularly by Woods, whose

voice borders on flawless throughout.

The production boasts a small and versatile cast, working together to sing, dance, horse around, and very busily move sets in a flash, as the transitions between the many short scenes call for supreme adaptability and precision. The overall effect was that of a small town, working together and dependent on one another, right down to the cracker-jack crew — each change had obviously been carefully planned and rehearsed (just as it should be, of course), and everything seemed to go off without a hitch (which is not always possible). The simple set was charming and serviceable, playing interior and exterior with style, and **Darrell Clark**'s lighting design worked seamlessly with the sets, the space, and with the hand-painted backdrops created by **Anna Scheckel**, to evoke a strong sense of place and the beauty of the unspoiled country setting.

The cast was strong enough that identifying standout performances is difficult. **Marilla** and **Matthew Cuthbert**, played by **Christopher Callen** (named by her parents for the patron saint of travelers) and **Don Margolin**, respectively, were, once past Marilla's requisite spit and vinegar, the warm and homey souls that any lost child would want to come home to.

Christopher Higgins, as the local heartthrob, **Gilbert Blythe**, plays the part with intelligence and charisma, and both sings and dances well, winning the hearts of the audience as well as those belonging to the everpresent gaggle of swooning schoolgirls. Hands down, the best song in the show is "**What Do You Call A Boy?**", a cavalcade of adolescent hormones that aptly expresses the ongoing battle of the sexes, with the teasing, the flirting, the mind-boggling reversals. This romantic play-drama is truly adorable in the post-Facebook world, for its simplicity and nostalgia, but also for its smart insight



into the minds of teenagers, then and even now. The other boys in the cast are a good foil for Gilbert's dominant presence, and **Melinda Porto** (Diana) and **Kailey Nicole Swanson** (Josie) turned in solid performances as best friend and nemesis. (Swanson is perfect as the pretty girl we love to hate.)

But there were two players who came close to stealing the show: **Barbara Niles**, as the aforementioned **Rachel Lynde**, can make you simultaneously want to smack her and hug her, and **James Jaeger**, as the hapless but well-meaning teacher, **Mr. Phillips**, (as well as a brief stint as the stationmaster in the first scene) has many moments of whimsy that will make him hard to forget. His characterization as Phillips is dead-on in posture, voice and demeanor — just as I'd always imagined.

The music itself, both the songs and the incidental tunes, is well-crafted and infused with significant humor, embodying Upward's style and putting the best of his considerable talent to good use. He and Scheckel are a well-matched team, resulting in a script that is funny, thoughtful, and quite true to its source. Concessions to time or logistics are few, if memorable — little girls with the croup don't usually throw up and then jump up with an immediate zest for life — but any such license is fully excusable. In the end, Upward and Scheckel (Scheckel and Upward?) have succeeded in building a strong adaptation and some very entertaining storytelling.

The show has been extended, and runs through October 14. Performances are at the Carrie Hamilton Theatre, at Pasadena Playhouse. Click for the [event listing](#) and the [ticketing page](#).