

## The Bodyguard: The musical hits Brisbane with Melbourne calling!

BY IMOGEN A. ROSE | 28 July 2017



The Bodyguard: The Musical is currently touring Australia. It's a production shamelessly focused upon the music and the hits of a legend. *Imogen A. Rose* reviews it.

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The Bodyguard: The Musical is a stage production with a popular history. It carries with it the influence and mammoth, commercial success of the 1992 film starring Whitney Houston and Kevin Costner. Houston made her acting debut with a role that enabled her voice to steal the show. The soundtrack became the best-selling soundtrack of all time, the highlight of course being Whitney Houston's spectacular and unforgettable rendition of "I Will Always Love You". The song was originally written and recorded by Dolly Parton in 1973. Houston's cover was pure and powerful. She imbued the notes and lyrics with an ownership and beauty that captivated audiences around the world. As a consequence, it became one of the highest selling singles of all time. Indeed, it remains the best-selling single by a woman, in music history.

There's always a danger, an added risk, when attempting to remake or adapt an iconic film or production. Audiences are relentlessly unforgiving of anything, or anyone, that could tarnish treasured memories.

Thus, how does one recreate the success of The Bodyguard on stage and who would dare play the female lead?

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In the lead female role of pop-star Rachel Marron is Paulini Curuenavuli (known mostly by her first name). Paulini found fame upon the inaugural season of Australian Idol in 2003. Her ability to launch and sustain a successful music career is indicative of her wonderful talent and determination. On stage, her strength is her voice and she relishes the opportunity to shine through song.



In the title role, well-known Australian soapie star, Kip Gamblin, plays an ex-secret service agent assigned to protect Marron from a deranged and threatening stalker. The stalker is played by Brendan Irving.

Prinnie Stevens more than ably performs as Marron's sister, Nicki, bringing an effective sense of melodious melancholy to hits such as Saving All My Love For You and Run To You.



This is more concert than play with an emphasis upon costume and choreography. There is little to be said for character, theme or plot, though there are moments of thematic promise. In many scenes, the dialogue is stilted and the acting wooden. There is also no real suspense to the stalker plotline and it's hard to know whether having seen or missed the film version will help or hinder the attempt to form any real cohesion of story.

It's worth noting that the film was a commercial, though not critical, success. The stage version began with a hit on London's West End in 2012. It has been similarly delighting audiences around the world, who clearly connect with the feel-good nature, hyped-up mood and music. This is a play that will entertain, rather than deeply move audiences. It's about show-stopping style with an undeniable warmth underlying the show. Indeed, the sheer positive energy created by the music makes for a genuinely fun night out.

The show delivers a crowd-pleasing array of Whitney Houston hits, including Queen of the Night, I'm Every Woman, I Wanna Dance with Somebody, Run to You and Greatest Love of All.

When the moment of the night finally arrives, there is a palpable pleasure as Paulini begins the famous lines of I Will Always Love You. In the cappella section she purrs, "If I should stay, I would only be in your way. So I'll go, but I know I'll think of you every step of the way". Initially, it's hard not to picture the image and sound of the late Whitney Houston. But as Paulini continues, untrammelled by the weight of the song's history and aided by extravagant staging, she releases the full power of her incredible voice, successfully seizing the song and commanding the theatre in sensational form.

This is a musical production that aims to please, and it does. The encore seals the night with most of the cast there to raise audience members to their feet for a sing-and-dance along to I Wanna Dance With Somebody.

One might not have reason to reflect upon the story but one will likely leave with a spring in one's step, happily humming the fantastic soundtrack for days to come!

The Bodyguard: The Musical is at Brisbane's Lyric Theatre, QPAC until August 13.

The season begins in Melbourne at the Regent Theatre August 24 and runs until October 27.

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