

BWW Reviews: Danny Kaye Returns to Arlington

by Keith Tittermary July 25, 2014



If Danny Kaye had not been born," a Hollywood writer once observed, "no one could possibly have invented him. It would have been stretching credibility far past the breaking point". Those words begin almost every biography of the legendary Danny Kaye and they are fitting. Kaye may not have been as popular as Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly, or may have been the person to get when Donald O'Connor wasn't available, but Kaye left a legacy on entertainment. You can narrow down to a handful of influential artists whose legacy is still being found in modern day entertainers. You can see pieces of Kaye in

early Robin Williams, or Will Ferrell in his *Saturday Night Live* days. Kaye took the "song and dance" man routine and went one step further - the patter song and the foppish mannerisms that made his style unique.

Kaye, who died in 1987, may live on in yearly television broadcasts of *White Christmas*, but that is just one mark on a long career that spanned Broadway, Hollywood, television, radio, and live performances. For most audiences, they remember Kaye singing with Bing Crosby or dancing with Vera-Ellen in the perennial holiday musical, but for entertainer **Brian Childers**, he embodies Kaye every chance he gets.

What started out as a play written by Kaye's former publicist, Bob McElwaine, became a career defining role. **Childers** famously portrayed Kaye in TACT's 2001 production of *Danny and Sylvia: A Musical Love Story* and would not only go on to win the Helen Hayes Awards for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Musical, but would go on to become one of the country's foremost Kaye portrayals, if not the best.

Now, 13 years later, after an Off-Broadway run of *Danny and Sylvia*, a performance at the Hollywood Bowl and countless other appearances, **Childers**, or should I say Danny Kaye is back at the place where it all began, and sadly, for the last time, as TACT announced this week that the upcoming season would be its last.

This time around, Danny is sans Sylvia, and is telling a retrospective life story. Under the supervisor of expert director Stephen Nachamie (Olney's *A Chorus Line*), **Childers** breathes new life into a familiar friend. After performing the same role for 13 years in various incarnations, you could get stale, but **Childers** doesn't. **Childers**, although physically doesn't really resemble Kaye, he has his mannerisms and unique style down solid. You actually forget that an actor is playing the legend. **Childers** has every aspect of Kaye down, and not in caricature. There is a fine line when playing a famous person, and a famous person who is known for a certain style. Few performers have accomplished this. In the recent string of Hollywood biopics few actors (including some who have won Oscars for their performances) have been able to embody a soul like **Childers** has. He becomes Kaye. He is Kaye. After 13 years of playing him, he truly has gotten better with age.

Childers of course performs many of Kaye's signature patter-songs, "Tchaikowsky (and Other Russians)", "Minnie The Moocher", "The Gypsy Drinking Song". And he does so oh so effortlessly. But what was the most remarkable part of the evening was when he toned it down and gave us a glimpse of Kaye's softer side, including his heartfelt medley from *White Christmas*, including the title song and "Count Your Blessings". But the best performance in an evening of great performances was his finale, "Anywhere I Wander". It was such a subtle and beautiful way to end an immensely entertaining evening.

Childers, working with Director Nachamie has created a wonderfully entertaining evening in an intimate cabaret setting and accompanied by musical director / Bing Crosby stand-in, Jeffrey Biering. Together Childers and Biering duet on "Sisters" and they have some playful banter throughout the evening.

[An Evening With Danny Kaye](#) plays through August 16, 2014 at Gunston Theatre Two in Arlington. For tickets you can call The American Century Theater box office at (703) 998-4555 or purchase them online.