

# 'She Loves Me' beguiles on Citadel stage

By Myrna Petlicki  
Pioneer Press



Coworkers Amalia Balash (Hannah Louise Fernandes) and Georg Nowack (Travis Ascione) can't seem to get along but there's something in the air at the Budapest perfumery where they work in the Broadway musical "She Loves Me," staged Nov. 15-Dec. 17 at Citadel Theatre. (Ralph Durham/HANDOUT)

In person, co-workers Amalia Balash and Georg Nowack quarrel nonstop at the Budapest perfumery where they work. On paper, they are perfect companions.

We won't explain how we know that to not spoil things for people who haven't previously seen the Broadway musical "She Loves Me," which will be performed Nov. 15-Dec. 17 at Citadel Theatre in Lake Forest.

Performances of the musical by Jerry Bock (music), Sheldon Harnick (lyrics), and Joe Masteroff (book) are at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays and 3 p.m. Sundays, plus 1 p.m. Wednesdays, Nov. 22 and Dec. 6. Previews are at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 15-16. There are no performances on Nov. 23 or Dec. 7.

Amalia Balash is “definitely a woman that’s ahead of her time, said Hannah Louise Fernandes, who plays the new perfumery salesperson. “She is very outspoken and very sure of her place in the workforce. At the same time she is very romantic and optimistic about love. I like to think that she has a sense of humor and she’s really, really intelligent.”

Fernandes doesn’t believe that Amalia dislikes Georg but rather she is bothered by the fact that he is not taking her seriously and is becoming an obstacle to her on the job.

The actor is particularly pleased to play Amalia because “I think that she is one of the smartest characters I have ever played. I really appreciate her depth. It’s been a while since I played a character that cares about things that I care about — art and literature. I love her heart.”

Fernandes believes that the intimacy of the Citadel Theatre will make this production distinctive. That size space is a change for Fernandes, who recently performed at the Lyric Opera and Paramount Theatre.

“Georg is very straight-laced, very career focused,” said Travis Ascione, who plays the perfumery employee. “He likes his job, he loves the people that he works with, he loves what he does and he’s good at it. I think he’s a little bit of a romantic. I don’t know if he would admit that.”

Unfortunately, Georg’s love of his co-workers doesn’t extend to Amalia. Ascione observed that that’s because once Amalia begins working at the shop, things start going awry.

The challenge of the role, Ascione said, is dealing with his character’s extreme mood shifts. “We don’t get to see a lot of Georg at a level mood,” the actor said, noting that he sometimes shows flashes of “severe depression and severe elation.” The challenge is “navigating that roller coaster of ups and downs,” Ascione said.

“It stands the test of time,” director Matthew Silar said of the musical.

Ascione agreed, observing that, even though the show was written in the 1960s, “It feels really modern. It could have taken place in a small shop in Chicago 2023.”

“Especially during the holidays, it’s just so delightful,” Silar added. “We don’t really write musicals to be delightful anymore.”

There’s more to it than that, though, Silar said. “It has this central question about what it means to love someone else and to allow them to see us fully for who we are,” he explained.

The director praised his two co-stars saying that Fernandes has “one of the most beautiful voices in all of Chicago.” He noted that Ascione’s Shakespeare training has made him a match for Fernandes.

“To get two actors at the heart of this story that have the training to fill houses with language and with music and then to get to put them in this intimate space and ask them to find the truth for two hours is really special in a show that has such a universal theme,” Silar said.

### **‘She Loves Me’**

**When:** Nov. 17-Dec. 17; previews Nov. 15-16

**Where:** Citadel Theatre, 300 S. Waukegan Road, Lake Forest

**Tickets:** \$40-\$45; \$20 previews

**Information:** 847-735-8554, ext. 1; [citadeltheatre.org](http://citadeltheatre.org)

Myrna Petlicki is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.