

NEW YORK NEW YORK

BY MICHAEL SANDER

NOV. 22-28, 1990

PRETTY FACES Actors Outlet Theatre

Although originality helps, it is not always a prerequisite for providing pleasure in the theatre. Witness *Pretty Faces*, a new musical by **Robert W. Cabell** at Actors Outlet Theatre. This backstage peek at a beauty pageant for the "large and lovely"



The ensemble cast of "Pretty Face" at the Actor's Outlet Theatre

seems made up of bits and pieces from earlier shows, notably *A Chorus Line*, *Gypsy*, and *Smile*, in both writing and staging. But author Cabell and director/choreographer **Gene Foote** have learned their lessons well, and *Pretty Faces* provides considerable entertainment of its own.

Cabell's premise is that big can be beautiful, and so he posits a beauty contest in which the participants are no less determined to find fame and fortune than their more svelte counterparts. Their incentive is fired by the presence of Monique, winner in an earlier year and now a major media star, serving as co-host of the pageant and sharing a love-hate relationship with her muscleman movie-star boyfriend Roger. Several stories are woven through the rehearsal period and pageant night, with almost everybody getting at least one solo and joining in a clever series of concerted numbers detailing everyone's sleepless nights. Cabell's book is efficiently crafted, with enough laughs and human interest details to keep the story perking. His lyrics are frequently awkward or pedestrian (he could use some help here), but his music provides enough melodic or rhythmic changes on its antecedents to strike the ear pleasantly and to provide useful vehicles for his powerful soloists. Foote's staging is swift-paced and theatrical, making the best use of

the small stage space and limited dance abilities of his performers.

It is the performers, particularly the women, who are the major strength of *Pretty Faces*. **Lynn Halverson** exudes real star presence as the glamorous Monique, as well as having the vocal authority to sell Cabell's two major ballads. Among the contestants, **Amy Ryder**, as a young woman with a confidence problem, and sweetly naive **Kathleen Rosamond Kelly** are particular standouts. But they are all fine, especially in the vocal department: **Amy Jo Phillips**, **Heather Anne Stokes**, **Margaret Dyer**, and **Liz Leisek**. The men fare less well, although **Michael Wintner** has an offbeat charm as a stage manager who falls for a contestant. **Charles Mandracchia**, as Roger, keeps his body beautiful under wraps for most of the evening, and proves to be an awkward actor with a voice pleasant of timbre but vague of pitch. **Ron Meier** is out of his depth as the pageant stage.

The money invested in the show has been well spent, with a versatile mobile set by **Peter Rogness**, fluent lighting by **Clifton Taylor**, and flashily theatrical costumes by **George Bergeron**. **Jim Mronchik** is the able musical director of Arnie Gross' arrangements. Though there is still some work to be done—especially in the second act, where the pace is slowed by too many extraneous solos—*Pretty Faces* makes attractive use of proven show business materials.