

# British Theatre Guide

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## Johnny Guitar

Book by Nicholas van Hoogstraten, music and lyrics by Martin Silvestri and Joel Higgins  
Century Center for the Performing Arts, New York  
(2004)

You don't have to have seen the 1954, cult "B" picture, *Johnny Guitar*, to appreciate this tongue-in-cheek offering at Century Center. It is the most well known of the "spaghetti" westerns genre because of its past-their-heyday celebrity casting of Joan Crawford, Mercedes McCambridge, and Sterling Hayden. (A nod here to the loss earlier this month of the Oscar winner, McCambridge.)

Like some of the better spoofs off-Broadway has offered recently, it very quickly sets up the jokes; a ball of tumbleweed rolls through a very rusty and utilitarian set, the too-earnest torch singer Judy McLane laments all over the stage, and back-up singers pop up from behind the bar. The bone-dry delivery throughout by Crawford lookalike McLane as bar owner Vienna, the mugging McCambridge lookalike Ann Crumb as Emma Small and the positively delicious Steve Blanchard as Johnny Guitar (Logan) head a great ensemble cast who portray the various towns folk.

Like all good "B" Westerns overloaded with clichés, this becomes a shoot out over territory and love; right over night. Much could have been made of the stories roll reversal of the two women, the bar owner and the landowner, fighting over the man, the bar's singer.

The music and lyrics by Martin Silvestri and Joel Higgins move the predictable plot along; humming was heard in the lobby. The small band marshalled by James Mironchik, positioned aloft, add to the humor. The book by Nicholas van Hoogstraten covers most of the territory. The songs ebb with "Welcome Home" (which I think was supposed to let the audience know that the bar was closed and now just a simple home) and peak with the deadpan delivery of "Tell Me A Lie", which ends with Blanchard ripping his shirt open to the glee of the audience. Costumes by Kaye Voyce work for the most part. We get to see the ever-so-rugged Vienna in tight jeans with gun tied around her thigh as well as the requisite red negligee. The direction by Higgins gently rustles every nuance of humor without becoming predictable or tedious. *Johnny Guitar* is a welcome bit of humor and music riding into town.

Reviewer: [Catherine Henry Lamm](#)