

British Theatre Guide

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Walmartopia

Book, Music and Lyrics by Catherine Capellaro and Andrew Rohn
Minetta Lane Theatre, New York
(2007)

What starts as a musical investigating social injustice eventually dissolves into sci-fi silliness, which is a shame as it showed real promise up to a point.

We have all (in the UK at least) heard of the McLibel Two who took on the hamburger giants; Walmart is another globalising conglomerate that puts profits above every other consideration.

Catherine Capellaro and Andrew Rohn look at their behaviour at both boardroom and shop floor levels and, to be honest, this organisation with over one million employees world-wide stinks, if we can believe what is sung at us.

Our guides are mother and daughter, Vicki and Maia Latrell from Madison Wisconsin. They are treated like the dirt that their friend Miguel cleans from the floors of the store where they work.

Despite putting in five years of hard labour, Vicki, played by Cheryl Freeman who has a pleasing soul singer's voice, cannot afford even the down payment on an apartment. She plays the game, hoping for a minor promotion that eventually passes her by.

Nikki M. James' Maia is less emollient, happy to talk sedition (or at least unionisation) with Latino Miguel (Bradley Dean).

This however is a dismissal offence in a company run by the odiously oily Scott Smiley, played by John Jellison. He follows the all-American and everything-ist principles laid down by Scotty Watson as the company's founder, Sam Walton.

Fourteen years after his death, "Uncle" Sam's head makes a surprise appearance, looking like a human dalek, to enliven proceedings. By then, the mother-daughter team have been recruited to sing at an event to make the company look less misogynistic. There, Maia speaks up and they are condemned by a mad doctor to travel in time.

After the interval, they find themselves in a Walmartopian prison c. 2037. In true 1984 style, the world has been taken over by Wal-Mart with the exception of the rebel state of Vermont, which in real life has taken on the low-cost store.

The second half, moves towards a showdown battle between Vermont rebels and the Wallies who subscribe to the company's slave labour policies.

In another musical set-piece, the ladies, aided by rebel Zeb (Dean again) speak up for freedom and effortlessly persuade all present of the justice of their cause. Would that Hitler or Stalin had been such pushovers!

The music employs a variety of styles majoring on soul and middle of the road but with one great rock number that would not fit into many musicals entitled *Socialist Paradise*, for which one can forgive a lot. Otherwise the best and most meaningful song is *These Bullets are Freedom*, written by Steve Tyska.

If the writers had stuck to their guns and used the whole show to do a Michael Moore type expose of Wal-Mart, this would have been a far better piece. As it is, *Walmartopia* is harmless, mildly entertaining fun with some good comic moments but nothing more.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)