

SNOWED UNDER

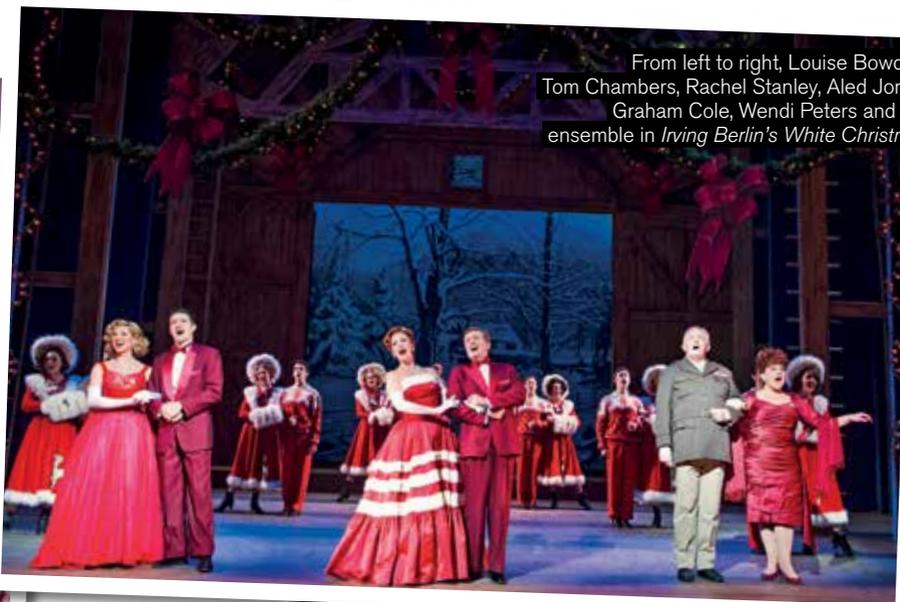
Marianka Swain was suffocated by sentiment at *Irving Berlin's White Christmas* at the Dominion Theatre on November 13



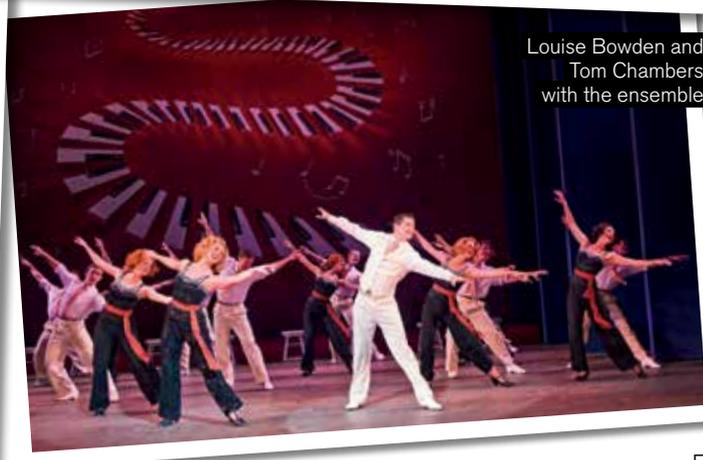
Louise Bowden as Judy



Tom Chambers and Aled Jones with the cast of *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*



From left to right, Louise Bowden, Tom Chambers, Rachel Stanley, Aled Jones, Graham Cole, Wendi Peters and the ensemble in *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*



Louise Bowden and Tom Chambers with the ensemble

This season to be nostalgic, but even the most misty-eyed yuletide reveller will struggle with the sheer volume of syrup in *White Christmas* – the theatrical equivalent

of marinating in cheap eggnog. Based on the 1954 film, a wholesome star vehicle for Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye and Rosemary Clooney, Morgan Young's production retains its affability, but loses

its zest: everyone's working too hard at having fun. David Ives and Paul Blake's stolid book makes few changes to the loopy original. Broadway sensations Bob and Phil pursue sister act Betty and Judy

to Vermont, where they're reunited with their former General, whose inn is in dire financial straits. Cue the old "We can do the show right here!", with a barn fundraiser and military reunion solving everything

just in time for the first snowfall. The only hint of jeopardy stems from creaky misunderstanding. Inhabiting the vaudevillian double-act leads are *Strictly* alumni Aled Jones and Tom Chambers. This old-fashioned material requires

triple-threat charm; unfortunately, Jones is a single threat at best – velvety voice, lumbering physicality and American accent by way of Bangor. His supposedly tempestuous courtship with Rachel Stanley's sultry Betty is less romantic

Fred 'n' Ginger numbers – what he lacks in technique, he makes up for in cheesy likeability. However, Louise Bowden's Judy outshines him with pin-sharp footwork and impressive turns. Skinner's ensemble tap routines, though unpolished, are

easily the highlight, accompanied by the orchestra's robust delivery of Irving Berlin's indelible tunes. Belter Wendi Peters scene-steals deliciously and Graham Cole offers a dignified General, but the inclusion of a precocious child role exacerbates the sickly-sweet schmaltz. Anna Louizou's complex set changes require too much front-of-curtain vamping, and, combined with Carrie Robbins' costumes (knitwear fetish-meets-exploded Christmas cracker), produces a feast of seasonal kitsch.

Cosy as mince pies and mulled wine by the fire, but after nearly three hours of a show aiming for spectacle and scraping saccharine panto, you're left with terrible toothache. ●

Irving Berlin's White Christmas is at London's Dominion Theatre until January 3. www.dominiontheatre.com