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Fast-paced 'Strut' carries the night

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"The All Night Strut" -- filled with melodies from the 1930s and '40s -- is more than a trip down memory lane, thanks to some inventive tweaks from director-choreographer Dennis Courtney at Florida Studio Theatre.

There's just enough verbal bantering among the four superb singers to keep the show from feeling like just a musical revue, as Sophia Hinshelwood (The Alto), Jennifer Johns (The Soprano), Joel Newsome (The Tenor) and Jim Weaver (The Baritone) run through a couple dozen jazz, blues, swing and bebop tunes that will be familiar to most ears.

Clad in coordinating outfits of black and white --sassy dresses for the gals, snappy suits and two-toned shoes for the guys in the first act, upgraded to satin evening gowns, feathered headdresses and tails, respectively, in the second -- the foursome swings right into action with "Chattanooga Choo-Choo." From there, they work neatly through Depression-era social commentary and romance to World War II troop support and, again, romance.

Weaver, who brings a wonderfully expressive face to his part, winking and wiggling eyebrows in a sometimes sly, sometimes suggestive manner on "Ain't Misbehavin,'" sings "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" with appropriate bitterness. He's the best dancer of the lot as well, with sharp, precise moves.

The four work smoothly together on a slow-tempo, sensual "Java Jive," with Hinshelwood adding the right amount of "pop" here and there. She's also sensational in "Tuxedo Junction" and the gospel-tinged "Operator."

Newsome's tenor goes a bit underused, although he steps neatly into the spotlight for "White Cliffs of Dover."

Johns brings a lighter sensibility, literally, with her dazzling blondness and Doris Day smile. She delivers a sunny and lovely rendition of "I'll Be Seeing You."

Director Courtney and music director Scot Woolley add a nice bit of updating to "Fascinating Rhythm" as the Gershwin standard segues into a bit of a hip-hop feel, without pushing it too hard.

The show comes in at a tight 90 minutes, making it a perfect matinee or after-dinner treat.
