



All great music in an 'All Night Strut' at FST

By Karen Mamone

Take four talented performers and stir them up with some of the toe-tappin'est music ever written and it's hard to find fault with a show like "The All Night Strut."

Sure, a few of the arrangements seemed a little too Starlight-Loungey, and you could entertain a notion that this or that number could have been replaced by this or that other one.

But most of that is moot in the face of this gloriously spirited compendium of jazz, blues, standards and bebop melodies of one of America's golden eras of popular music.

"... Strut" gives us an ear to the best-loved music of the 1930s and '40s, when composers and lyricists such as George and Ira Gershwin, Johnny Mercer, Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields were turning out iconic numbers that became the soundtrack of the lives of the "Greatest Generation."

Among them are immortal songs such as "As Time Goes By," "I'll Be Seeing You," "Fascinatin' Rhythm" and "In the Mood," as well as the zippy novelty numbers of the era that took listeners on a journey - to Harlem's lowlife with "Minnie the Moocher" or to the frontlines of war with "GI Jive" and "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition."

"The White Cliffs of Dover" and "I'll Be Seeing You" captured the pain of wartime romance and separation; and "Lullaby of Broadway" and "It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing" illustrate the fabled American optimism in the face of world conflict and economic crisis.

If you can't have a good time at this show, you shouldn't be allowed out at night.

"The All Night Strut's" four compass points are soprano Jennifer Johns, frisky and pert as a USO chorine; Sophia Hinshelwood, a classy alto with a resonant dusky voice; spirited tenor Joel Newsome; and fine and mellow baritone Jim Weaver.

Special credit needs to go to pianist Jim Prosser, who got a bit of his just desserts with a nod during "Beat Me, Daddy, Eight to the Bar."

Directed by Dennis Courtney, who recently staged the marvelous FST productions of "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" and "Ethel Waters: His Eye is on the Sparrow," Strut is a treat that shouldn't be missed.

Conceived and originally directed and choreographed by Fran Chamas, "All Night Strut" was performed to sell-out houses at FST in 2000.

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