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Lyric season opener is musical, visual treat



Christianne Tisdale is Marian Paroo and David Ruprecht is Harold Hill in Lyric Theatre's production of "The Music Man," continuing with evening performances through Saturday. To charge tickets by phone, call 810-9302. Courtesy Photo

By **APRIL WILKERSON**
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Lyric Theatre's season opener of "The Music Man" is a treat for the eyes as well as the ears.

Incredible set design and well-cast performers make this musical favorite a fun evening. "The Music Man" continues its run at Lyric through Saturday.

Set designer Doug Getzoff has created wonderful sets for the town of River City, Iowa, population 2,212. Especially impressive is the inside of the town library and the footbridge surrounded by trees and twinkling stars. Lyric's big stage allows for a greater creativity in set design, and ingenuity is evident in this production.

The Meredith Willson production is known for its catchy tunes like "Seventy-Six Trombones" and "Trouble" and ballads such as "Goodnight, My Someone" and "Lida Rose." The orchestra, directed by Louis F. Goldberg (OU professor who was memorable last season in "Pump Boys and Dinettes"), provides the music in an open orchestra pit. Much dancing takes place near and around the pit, making for a much more "heightened" experience.

The joy of this production, though, is David Ruprecht as Professor Harold Hill, the traveling salesman who makes a living by swindling townspeople into thinking their young people must form a boys band in order to stay out of trouble. Ruprecht is fun to watch as he schemes his fortune by planting the seed of alarm among folks in this small town: that new pool table in the billiards parlor is the devil's




tool, and unless the children have something constructive to do, they're going to have trouble with a capital T.

Ruprecht made his Broadway debut in 1980 and has had a career in television as well. Among his TV appearances are serving as host of Lifetime's "Supermarket Sweep," two years as Dan Ryan on "Days of Our Lives," host of NBC's "Real People," and numerous other appearances and roles.

His stage experience is apparent as he smoothly moves about and encounters more than he bargained for in this little town.

One of the roadblocks to his plot is town librarian and piano teacher Marian Paroo, played by Christianne Tisdale. Paroo sees right through Professor Hill's claims of musical magic and seriously questions his revolutionary new "think system" ("If he thinks the Minuet in G, he won't have to play the notes," Hill tells Marian's brother, Winthrop.).

Tisdale, too, has impressive Broadway and regional theater credits, and in her bio she calls herself "a reformed opera singer." Operatic training is evident as she has the most powerful voice of the cast.

Harold Hill is aided in his conspiracy by Marcellus Washburn, former cohort and willing accomplice. Rick Kleber plays Marcellus in his Lyric debut and enjoys his character's high-stepping shenanigans.

More laughs come from River City Mayor Shinn and his wife, Eulalie Mackecknie Shinn, portrayed by Cy Young and Jane Manning. When he speaks, Mayor Shinn claims he "couldn't make myself any clearer if I had a plate glass belly button," but his oratorical attempts are as clear as mud. When he feels his wife is speaking too much, he tells her he "doesn't want to hear another poop out of you," and he often begins his public talks with "Four score and seven years ago... ."

Eulalie Mackecknie Shinn is even more comical in her new Harold Hill-directed role: chair of the new Ladies Auxiliary for Classic Dance. She and her fellow "Pickalittle Ladies" are hilarious in their fancy hats as they "pick a little, talk a little, cheep, cheep, cheep."

Mayor Shinn enlists help to try to debunk Professor Hill's work. He asks the school board to track down Hill's credentials, but the foursome also gets sidetracked by his wiles. Every time they question him, he craftily starts them

singing.

The four board members are played by the barbershop quartet The OK-4, which has a long history with Lyric Theatre. The group was formed in 1966 to perform in "Music Man" at Lyric, and this year marks their fourth appearance in the production. They also have stayed together as a barbershop quartet, performing across the nation and in Canada. The OK-4 has been judged among the top 10 quartets six times in international competition. Members are Bill Thompson, Brian Hogan, Ken Witten and Gaylon Stacy.

Other cast members who make quite an impression are Brenda Spurlin-Freeman as Mrs. Paroo, Marian's idealistic mother who admonishes her not to keep "the flint in one drawer and the steel in another" if she wants to find her true love.

Scott Langdon is anvil salesman Charlie Cowell, who is out to expose Harold Hill as a fraud. Bret Shuford is Tommy Djilas, a mischievous River City boy who has a crush on the mayor's daughter, Zaneeta Shinn (Jordon Kate Ballard). Shuford and Ballard are fine actors and dancers who have many nice moments in the show.

Christopher Rice plays Marian's lisping brother Winthrop who gets to sing the catchy "Gary, Indiana," and Katie Diefenderfer is Amaryllis, Marian's trying piano student.

"Music Man" is well-directed and choreographed by Dennis Courtney, who created many impressive dance routines. The only drawback to the production (and one that by now may have been rectified) is a sound system that tended to hiss and spurt intermittently.

Otherwise, the evening makes for a funny, toe-tapping time.

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