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StrawHat Theatre with decades of greats

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Review to run through July 27

06/20/02

Bob Smith

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UCO StrawHat Music Theatre opened its summer season this past weekend with the tune-filled "Swinging on a Star," based on the songs of Oscar winning composer Johnny Burke.

Opening on Broadway in 1995, the show was a 1996 Tony nominee for Best Musical. Conceived and written by Michael Leeds, the show weaves a musical tribute to life in American from the 1920s to the 1950s.

The talented ensemble of performers includes Jessica Chesbro, Cyndi Steele-Harrod, Abby Redmon, Kendra Campbell Milburn, Brad Milburn, Chris Milburn, and Clark Roberts — all of whom are either graduates or current students in the UCO Music Theatre program.

Opening in a 1925 Speakeasy, Chesbro, Harrod, and K. Martin get the show off to a great start with "You're Not the Only Oyster in the Stew" while Roberts, joined by Redmon, gets to show off his fabulous dancing skills as they perform "Ain't it a Shame About Mame."

It is easy to see how Roberts won the Overall Top Male Dancer Award at the World Championships of Performing Arts.

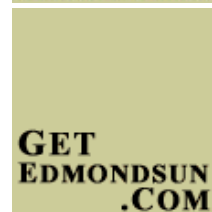
Chesbro returns to question "What's New" while Roberts and Harrod get the place moving with "Doctor Rhythm."

Moving into the Depression, Brad Milburn does a nice job with "Pennies From Heaven" while Harrod shows top form discussing her child in "His Rocking Horse Ran Away."

The Milburn brothers and Roberts make "Annie Doesn't Live Here Anymore" a rollicking treat while C. Milburn and Chesbro have fun with "One, Two, Button Your Shoe."

K. Milburn does excellent work singing "What Does It Take to Make You Take To Me" and "Irresistible" becomes a hilarious routine in the hands of K. Milburn, B. Milburn, Redmon, Roberts and Harrod.

Moving into the 1940s, Redmon, Chesbro, and K. Milburn do nice work with their performance of "Personality" as Harrod pours the feeling into "There's Always the Blues."



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B. Milburn shows off smooth vocals singing "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" and the entire cast does superb work with the Academy Award-winning "Swinging On a Star" from "Going My Way."

Act II takes us to Paramount Studios and Morocco with Bing (B. Milburn), Bob (C. Milburn), and Dorothy (K. Milburn).

Together and individually, these singers do wonderful work with such numbers as "Road to Morocco," "Apalachicola, Florida," and, joined by Chesbro and Redmon, "You Don't Have to Know the Language."

Interspersed with numerous laughs, we also have Roberts as a Sheik determined to take Dorothy back to "Pakistan" while Harrod does a nice job with "Shadows on the Swanee."

The evening closes out with some of the beautiful songs that show the poetry of Burke's words including "But, Beautiful" by Redmon, "Like Someone in Love" by Chesbro, the beautiful "Moonlight Becomes You" nicely sung by B. Milburn, Harrod's "Sunday, Monday, or Always," and the lovely "Misty" sung by Roberts.

Dennis Courtney has directed with skilled precision and along with his talented cast makes this a very polished, fast paced production carrying us down memory lane.

"Swinging on a Star" will run at 7 p.m. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday through July 27. Reservations are available by calling 974-3375.

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