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'Swingtime' at UCO's Strawhat



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06/21/01

Bob Smith

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University of Central Oklahoma's StrawHat Music Theatre opened their summer season this month with the rousing "Swingtime Canteen."

Opening Off Broadway February 24, 1995, the show ran for 300 performances.

Set on stage at a concert for the Eight U.S. Air Force in London in 1944, the show is full of familiar old tunes which receive fabulous treatment from the talented cast.

Singers for the production include Billie Thrash, Lexi Windsor, Beth Adele, Cyndi Steele Harrod and Katie Kircher, each receiving the opportunity to show off their talents as well as demonstrating some fine ensemble work.

Dancers James Grigsby, Anna Rayburn, Clark Roberts and Collette Simmons also demonstrate superb footwork, leaving the audience wishing to see more of them.

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Thrash does a nice job as Marian Arnes, the leader of the group, and shows herself to be in fine voice as she performs the familiar songs, with the ladies coming very effectively into thier own, when she sings the beautiful "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square" and the lovely "You'll Never Know."

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She and the company effectively get the show going as she tells the audience "Accentuate the Positive" and "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition."

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Yes 60%

No 40%

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Joined by Windsor, who portrays Lilly, and Kircher as Katie, the niece of Arnes, Thrash and the ladies become the Andrew Sisters, tossing out such tuneful numbers as "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," "Three Little Fishes," "Beer Barrel Polka," and "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" with a professional aplomb , winning the audience.

Kircher gives a nice freshness to Katie as the girl who has come on the tour thinking of the fun and excitement it will bring.

She shines nicely with such solos as "I Don't Want to Walk Without You" and "How High the Moon."

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Windsor does an outstanding job of wooing the men in the audience as she performs "Daddy."

Looking for a future in show business, Lilly isn't going to miss a bet. She also leads the company effectively in "Keep the Home Fires Burning" and even gets the audience involved singing "Pack Up Your Troubles."

Harrod as factory worker Topeka Abotelli is a joy to see on the UCO stage again where she did such fine work as an undergraduate.

She is in great form as she tells us about her rowdy son in "His Rocking Horse Ran Away" and shifts nicely to the moving "My Shining Hour."

As Jo Sterning, Arnes movie stand-in, Adele is sheer perfection, proving a true seductress singing "Love Isn't Born, It's Made," and she will break your heart performing "I'll Be Seeing You."

The four dancers prove they don't have to take a backseat to anyone as they win the audience in such numbers as "Hollywood Canteen" — the Act I finale that moves into the "Stars and Stripes Forever."

Roberts does excellent work in this number as Uncle Sam and Thrash as the Statue of Liberty, performing "Sing Sing Sing," along with the company that is worth the price of the show alone.

The Singtime Band, under the skillful direction of Lee Rucker, who also plays in it, includes David Hargis, John Horton, Paul Brodt, Mitch Bell, Christyn Raincrow and Justin P. Walke.

Walke does a wonderful job with the familiar songs that bring back memories for so many members of the audience.

Skillfully directed and wonderfully choreographed by Dennis Courtney, the show is a fast-paced treat that takes some audience members down memory lane and introduces others to wonderful songs from the 1940's.

"Swingtime Canteen" will run at 7:30 p.m. from Thursdays through Saturdays, through July 28.

Reservations are available by calling 974-3375.

This is a fun-filled way to spend a summer evening for young and old alike.

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