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THEATRE ROUND-UP

There's Plenty On Stage In Tucson These Days

By Margaret Regan

TUCSON IS RIDING a wave of splashy musical theatre, with two Broadway-style musicals launched in back-to-back weekends.

West Side Story, the second show mounted by the new Victory Productions, opens Thursday night at the TCC Music Hall, with a cast of 39, a 26-piece orchestra composed of many musicians moonlighting from the [Tucson Symphony Orchestra](#), and a conductor who's an old hand with the [Tucson Boys Chorus](#).



Two UA grads play the principal roles of Maria and Tony in the contemporary Romeo and Juliet tale, graced by the music of Leonard Bernstein. Carrie Mineck, a local professional often seen at Gaslight, will also bring her opera training to the part of Maria;

Stephen McLeod, a veteran of the now-defunct Southern Arizona Light Opera Company, portrays Tony. The leads are backed by a quartet of Los Angeles actors, including Shane Kirkpatrick as Jets member Riff. Kirkpatrick played Joseph in Victory's inaugural production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat* last spring.

The director, New Yorker Dennis Courtney, and Kirkpatrick co-choreographed the dances. The movements will resonate with the show's original choreography by the legendary Jerome Robbins, says co-producer Yvette Arata, but there's also a brand-new "ballet scene that's not in the movie...It's a young, energetic show," performed by a youthful cast. The chorus is drawn largely from local college and high school students. Victory, Arata says, is a local organization whose shows are meant to fill the musical-theatre gap left by the loss of SALOC. (Curtain goes up on *West Side Story* at 8 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, at the TCC Music Hall. Tickets are \$20 general, \$18 for seniors and kids under 12. They're available at the TCC box office, 791-4836, and all Dillard's outlets.)

Another group aiming to attract that same Broadway-show audience in Tucson is the Phoenix-based Theater League, which travels its productions around to several cities. Last weekend, Theater League brought its second show to town (the first was *Camelot* last spring). Its splashy *Oliver!* was an entertaining production boasting a live orchestra, semi-famous stars (theatre actress Andrea McArdle, once of *Annie* fame, and Richard Kline, formerly of TV's *Three's Company*), and some talented youngsters from L.A. in the lead roles. It also effectively dangled a local lure: A passle of



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kids from the [Tucson Boys Chorus](#) sang in the big orphanage scenes. Even though the locals had a bit of trouble with the high notes of "Food, Glorious Food," including them in the show was a smart move. On the pragmatic side, it brought in more ticket buyers; and, on the virtuous side, it helped promote a local arts group.

Oliver! of course is based on the Charles Dickens novel *Oliver Twist*, and like the original it's marred by unrealistic plot twists and simplistic *Deus ex Machina* solutions to intractable social problems. But, hey, the songs are tuneful, the dancing is lively and the villain, Fagin, is somebody you love to hate. Judging by the first two productions, Theater League can be counted on to bring satisfactory, if predictable, professional musical theater to town.

Less lavish than the other two but still full of music is Invisible Theatre's *Always...Patsy Cline*, which opened a three-week run Wednesday night, September 10. A musical tribute to the country-western star, the show features 21 of Cline's songs, including "Anytime," "Crazy" and "Sweet Dreams," played by a live band featuring Ed Davenport on bass, and drummers Dave Jeffrey and Dieter Schodde, among others. Liz McMahon of Tucson, a regular at IT and Gaslight, plays Cline. But besides all that music, the play tells the true story of the star's friendship with a Houston housewife. The work was written by Ted Swindley. (The show runs Tuesdays through Sundays through September 28, at Invisible Theatre, 1400 N. First Ave. Tickets run \$16 and \$18, depending on the show. For more information call the theatre at 882-9721.)

Finally, if it's good, old-fashioned repartee and intricate plot you want, the UA Arizona Repertory Theatre's production of *Arsenic and Old Lace* is just the thing. True, the robustly clever show now playing at the Lab Theatre is full of movie music, mostly extracts from assorted monster flicks and romances of the '40s, all of it comically timed to punctuate the action on stage. But there's none of this singing and dancing. Just great acting by a team of grad students, who are irresistible in the silly story of two kindly old ladies in 1940s Brooklyn who decide to do in a baker's dozen of old men and bury them in the basement. Directed with panache by visiting director Virginia Smith of Chicago, the play is graced by a fine cast, especially Kala Lynn Moses, a scene-stealer as the skinny sister Martha Brewster. Flawlessly impersonating an elder, Moses bends and shakes her body, gives an old-timer's vibrato to her voice, and somehow makes her lunacy entirely convincing. (*Arsenic and Old Lace* continues through September 21.) **TW**



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