

MPC's sparkling 'Guys and Dolls' is a joy to behold

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Hallelujahs and a "Grand Hurrah!" for the MPC Theatre Company's presentation of one of Broadway's greatest musicals, "Guys and Dolls."

Sparkling, high-spirited, full of verve and an unquenchable joy, director Gary Bolen's tautly integrated and imaginatively mounted production is a joy to behold.

Bolen's highly talented and polished cast brought out the full flavor of Damon Runyon's loving depiction of a New York that may never have existed, but the characters he wrote about, even though they were tinhorn gamblers and night club entertainers, have a charm and humanity that is irresistible even while they adhere to their own skewed code of honor.

Lyricist and composer Frank Loesser wrote hilariously inspired words and fitted them to unforgettable tunes to flesh out the story which revolves around a hunt to find a venue to continue "the oldest established permanent floating crap game in New York."

Nathan Detroit (Troy Johnson) is in charge of the game and he is being hounded by the gamblers and the police, who have really put the screws on his operation.

Johnson fills the bill as he pleadingly tries to handle the pressures also put on him by Miss Adelaide, his fiancée of 14 years.

His patience in the face of adversity is admirably projected and when he finally has the opportunity in "Sue Me" to use his fine powerful baritone to express his frustrations, he impressively rounds out the role.

As his frustrated fiancée, Laura Akard has perfected the New York vocal tone that rides piercingly over the orchestra to excellent effect.

Akard's comic skill brings out the humor of her situation in three of the funniest songs in the show.

Her lament about the psychomatic effects of her lengthy engagement and her frustration on her upper respiratory passages, was one of many show-stoppers.

As the other oddly matched romantic couple in the tale, Erica Racz as Miss Sarah, the "Mission broad," and Rob Devlin as Sky (Obadiah) Masterson, the noble, Biblically informed, high-rolling gambler, are a delight to watch and listen to.

They have some of the loveliest music in the show and they are both polished actors and singers.

Racz is spirited and strong. Devlin is stalwart partner and their duets "I'll Know" and "I've Never Been in Love Before" ring true.

Devlin does an exciting "Luck Be a Lady Tonight," which is another show-stopper with the collaboration of the show's very strong male contingent, whose dancing was exciting and very well done.

The trio who sing the "Fugue for Tinorns," Nicely Nicely Johnson (Jayar Walker), Benny Southstreet (Peter Hoffman), whose many pratfalls are a very funny running gag, and Rusty Charley (Jared Hussey), keep the story rolling along.

Walker performs a high-powered "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat," Mitch Davis as Uncle Arvide sings a warm, rich-sounding "More I Cannot Wish You."

There is such a wealth of talent and variety in the show that it can't all be detailed, but the flow of action in the opening scene showing a neon-lit Broadway with the Runyonesque characters strutting through to the beat of the just-raucous-enough "loosey-goosey" style of Barney Hulse's expert musicians is a gem of a beginning and sets up the excellent flavor of the production.

Casey Kearns' scenic design was very effective and Kathleen O'Brien's costumes were brightly colored and eye-filling.

Susan Cable's choreography was highly effective and skillfully performed with a stunning, almost outrageous tango danced by Camila de la Llata and Sam Given, as yet another show-stopper.

Thinking about the evening, there wasn't anything I would change except to note that, as usual, when you sit up close, the exuberant, but

highly proficient orchestra seems too loud, but they don't drown out the singers, which is a plus.

This is such a quality production that it would be a shame to miss it.

Nathalie Plotkin can be reached at nanoplotkin@redshift.com. GO!

THEATER REVIEW ·What: MPC Theatre Company presents Frank Loesser, Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows' "Guys and Dolls" ·Where: Morgan Stock Stage, Monterey Peninsula College, 980 Fremont St., Monterey ·When: Continues at 7 p.m. Thursdays and 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sunday matinees through Sunday, Aug. 19, which is a benefit for the MPC Foundation and MPC Drama Scholarship; buffet at 5 p.m., show at 7 p.m. ·Tickets: General admission \$15 online, \$18 in advance at the box office, \$25 at the door, seniors \$20, young adults (20 and under) \$15, children under 12 \$10. (Sunday, Aug. 19 benefit \$60, includes pre-show buffet and silent auction). Available by calling 646-4213 from 3-7 p.m. Wednesday-Friday or online at www.ticketguys.com ·Information: 646-4213 Laura Akard stars as Adelaide, Troy Johnson as Nathan Detroit, Rob Devlin as Sky Masterson and Erica Racz as Sister Sarah Brown, from left, in MPC Theatre Company's production of the Broadway hit "Guys and Dolls," which opens tonight (Thursday) at Monterey Peninsula College.

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