

Review: The Music Man

This past weekend West Hartford became “River City.” As a long time fan and frequent patron of Community Theater, I eagerly awaited the premier production of the West Hartford Community Theater. Well, I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. This was not Community Theater as I have experienced it. This rhapsodic performance of *The Music Man* was worthy of a professional stage. The brilliant interpretation could have easily justified the ticket prices at the Bushnell or similar venue.

From the beginning of the overture, the jam packed audience knew it was in for a superlative show. The orchestra was smooth and accomplished, blending seamlessly as one entity with the actors. Their interludes with Dixieland themes transported us back to another era.

As the curtain rose, there was the most enchanting scenery. It was more than obvious that a tremendous amount of thought and effort had lead to its creation. Then came the talented and enthusiastic thespians. Under inventive direction, this multi-talented amateur troupe left not a scintilla of doubt as to their professional abilities.

Roseanne Sweeney, playing the female lead of Marian the Librarian, has a most exceptional and polished voice. Her words, spoken or sung, were as clear as “bells on the hill.” She was mesmerizing to listen to and gave a flawless performance. As the Music Man, Robert Thornton, was Robert Preston come to life in West Hartford. He managed to expertly capture all facets of this inimitable character.

The audience was enthralled by the performances of the youngsters in the cast. Without exception they were as accomplished as the adults. Playing Winthrop, Leo Epstein was amazing. One can only hope to see him again in future productions.

The Barbershop Quartet, On Q, was an exciting addition not only for their wonderful musical abilities but their great comedic delivery as cast members. For a bonus, their harmonizing entertained during intermission.

The dance numbers were amazingly choreographed by high school senior, Tara Fitzgerald. Each dance sequence was appropriate to the scene and captured the excitement of the music. The individual dancers showed exceptional expertise.

There were so many highlights, far too many to mention but I must comment on two. First, the video chase sequence should earn someone an award. It was unprecedented and unparalleled in the annals of dramatic art. The audience was transported in its hysteria. The other transcendent moment occurred when Eulalie McKechnie Shin (Patrique Alton Hurd) and her Pickalittle ladies were on stage. This brilliant group’s efforts outshone the movie version. It was great fun to watch!

Bruce LaRoche, as West Hartford Community Theater co-founder and executive producer of *The Music Man*, was positively effervescent in his role as Marcellus. It’s easy to see the source of his joy. This was a magical and spellbinding effort by him and all the cast and crew. What a proud beginning for the entire town!

To repeat my “phraseology”, this was not a typical community theater production. If you missed this show, do not make the same mistake next year.

JANE M. STEPHENS, November 17, 2008