

WHCT's "The Music Man" is One Spirited Gem

By Castle Yuran

The lights are dimmed, the members of the orchestra, conducted by Emmett Drake, commence playing, and the curtains part to reveal a jaunty first scene set on a railway coach. This seamless first scene bodes well for the entire show, and indeed, the West Hartford Community Theater brings a consistent and utterly enjoyable vibrancy to *The Music Man*.

Under the proficient guidance of artistic directors Michael P. Morgan and Patrique Alton Hurd, the cast and crew truly create a fluent and harmoniously entertaining show.

This classic musical tells the story of "Professor" Harold Hill, who arrives in River City, Iowa, with plans to swindle the townsfolk out of their money by promising a marching band for the children if they buy the instruments and uniforms.

One by one, all of the River City citizens fall under Hill's spell as they hand over their cash and devotion -- even Marian Paroo, the hard-nosed town librarian. Things begin to unravel, however, when a rival salesman shows up and lets everyone know that Harold Hill is not who he says he is. Along the way, we're treated to songs such as "Seventy-six Trombones," "Trouble" and "Till There Was You."

One of the most enjoyable and unexpected moments in the show came from an innovative extra scene. A projection screen is brought onstage so that the audience may view a comical Main Street chase (West Hartford center

standing in for River City) as Harold Hill is pursued by an angry mob of River City citizens.

The central figure of the show and the "Music Man" himself is played with a perfectly vivacious attitude and precise skill by Rob Thornton. He makes theatre look easy, and lures the audience into the world of the play. Bruce LaRoche is ideal as Hill's sidekick Marcellus, and Susan Porta was charming as Mrs. Paroo.

Rosanne Sweeney, skilled master of the role of Marion Paroo, brings her own unique light to *The Music Man*, captivating the audience with her remarkable vocal and acting talents. Together, she and Rob Thornton beautifully rule the stage and credible life is breathed into the show, making it an absolute joy to view.

In addition to the adept acting, choreography and orchestral performance, the men of the real life quartet "On Q" (the squabbling school board members who find themselves reconciled by barbershop harmony) are a phenomenal aspect of the show on their own, begging recognition. Thomas Savinelli, Steve Wolf, Jim Kew, and Harrison King III add buoyancy to the mixture.

Complete with a talented cast, a wonderful set, and Meredith Willson's American classic story, West Hartford Community Theater's "The Music Man" proved to be one spirited gem.

The Music Man book, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson. Story by Meredith Willson and Franklin Lacey.

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