

'Strut!' charmingly brings back Swing Era

By JIM WINDELL

Isn't inflation something? A gallon of gas for \$1.30. An all-night strut in an hour and 15 minutes.

Around since 1975, "The All Night Strut" is a musical revue that returned to the Detroit area last week for a three-week engagement at the Birmingham Theatre. A musical celebration of the popular songs of the 30s and 40s, "The All Night Strut" is a slick and charming night of nostalgia.

Fran Charnas' revue of some of the songs we loved best in the decades of the Swing Era gives a distinct feeling of déjà vu. When it came around the first time, everyone was hungry for some of the great, "Why don't they write songs like this any more?" songs. That hunger has been abated by a spate of great musicals. "Bubbling Brown Sugar," "Eubie" and "Ain't Misbehavin'" cover some of the same songs from generally the same era.

LIKE MOST OF the other musical revues that have come our way, "The

All Night Strut!" has little more than nostalgia as a unifying thread. There is no attempt at a book. At times, the thread seems a bit threadbare.

Four singers, two male, two female, often sounding much like the Manhattan Transfer, give full treatment to 22 songs ranging from Glenn Miller's 1941 "Chattanooga Choo Choo" to Johnny Mercer's "Dream." The atmosphere is one of refinement and sophistication. Something like highly refined white sugar.

There is sweetness and it tastes good. But, every once in a while during the nearly two hours, some of the soul of say a "Bubbling Brown Sugar" would be welcome.

There is a glimmer of soul at times. Andrea Danford's lead vocal on Bessie Smith's blues novelty number "Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer" has some possibilities and she seems like she wants to cut loose a little more.

There are a few measures of gospel by the four during a World War II medley, and William Spivey's "Operator" gets a welcome infusion of the gospel

review

sound of the quartet. Otherwise, it is sweet and low. No brown sugar.

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS are augmented by the choreography of Fran Charnas. "Fascinating Rhythm" has a tap dance segment, and other dance steps and movements proved popular with Thursday night's audience.

The quartet is delightful with a slow, humorous version of the Ink Spots early 40s number "Java Jive." But, while Tony Rich displays a fine voice during Waller's "Ain't Misbehavin'," the version is plodding and sanitized.

In addition to Danford and Rich, the four excellent singers include Detroiters David Montague and Karen Murphy. A five-piece band backs them on stage. As accomplished as the vocalists, band members are not given solo space; an occasional instrumental outburst would help to remove some of the gleam and polish.

"The All Night Strut!" runs nightly through April 12 at the Birmingham Theatre, and it may be just the sophisticated sweetness that a lot of people are looking for.

Fastidious nostalgia that's easy to take. Unless you've been overindulging on this sort of thing lately.



"The All Night Strut!" cast features (from left) Andrea Danford, David Montague, Tony Rich and Karen Murphy.

Auditions announced for opera theater posts

Auditions for the 1980 fall season have been announced by Dr. David DiChiera Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT) general director.

Positions have open for the company's orchestra, auxiliary chorus and Artist-Interns program.

In-person auditions for the orchestra

will be held 1-6 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday at the Music Hall Center in Detroit. There are 38 openings, including the concertmaster chair.

Applicants should be prepared to sight read from MOT's 1980 repertoire and to perform a solo piece. Only members of the American Federation of Musicians will be considered.

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