

Sets, costumes enhance charm of 'The Boy Friend'

Performances of the Oakland University Center for the Arts production of "The Boy Friend" continue through Sunday, April 1, at Varner Studio Theatre on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information call 370-3013.

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer



Cathie Breidenbach

Stylish sets and costumes bring the sun-drenched colors of the French Riviera to Oakland University's Varner Studio Theatre in a vivacious production of "The Boy Friend."

The old-standby musical by Sandy Wilson celebrates 1920s-style energy and French joie de vivre. So what if the plot is a frivolous, far-fetched love story ending with not one but seven happy pairings? So what if none of the show's tunes linger long in memory?

The talented cast infuses the predictable, boy-meets-girl musical with toe-tapping energy. Like sunlight sparkling on the blue Mediterranean or champagne's bubbling effervescence, director Michael Gillespie's upbeat pacing radiates an infectious, happy innocence.

Wilson's songs and the cast's pleasing voices charm the ear for the moment and are as quickly forgotten, but Susan Barrett's gait and Betty Monroe's costumes, in contrast, linger in memory — their playful color sense and stylish coor-

dination creating pictures for the mind's eye to savor long after the finale.

CONSIDER THE opening scene — the grey marbled set of an elegant girls' school and six young ladies wearing identical black-and-white check dresses and carrying oversized white boxes with broad black stripes — a stunning study in black, grey and white. Studied, however, hold still to be contemplated, and the bevy of squealing teenagers overruns not only the stage but the aisles of the studio theater in their anticipation of the upcoming carnival ball and the promise of romance.

Or consider the beach scene. Striped awnings, polka-dot director's chairs and a backdrop aglow with Riviera sunshine reminiscent of a French Impressionist painting. Send in the same bevy of live-wire girls in vibrant bathing costumes. Add their boyfriends in coordinated beach attire, for a carefree image of sunlit days "en la plage" in Nice.

Amy Susan Heard with her blond hair and large, gentle eyes looks the part of the pretty ingenue, Polly

Browne, daughter of a British millionaire. Heard's sweet voice, which suits her character, may be a bit small for her duet with headmistress Madame Dubonnet, a role shared by Edith Digory and Phyllis Wolfe White.

Digory's full, operatic voice, lovely though it is, seems mildly out of character in a lightweight musical set to flapper music. Not so the voices of the talented young ladies — Amy Gore, Michelle Diponio, Carrie Slade, Dawn Michelle Hamblin and Julie Cline — and their boyfriends — Trevor Rutkowski, Corey Skaggs, Nicholas Bean, Allen J. Verschuere and Shawn W. Ryskamp.

They sing and dance with fitting Roaring '20s exuberance. With slicked-back hair and classic clothes, the boyfriends could have stepped out of a Ralph Lauren ad for the good, rich life.

SCOTT CRAWFORD as Polly Browne's love, Tony, exudes the gentle charm of a young John Ritter. Not only the young ladies and their boyfriends fall in love with love, Polly's stolid, British father, played convincingly by John-Paul White, succumbs to the green-eyed charms of Madame Dubonnet.

The able cast is rounded out by Nancy Jamieson Valassis as scene-stealing Hortense the maid and Joe Bailey, Audra Lord, Donald Martin Anderson and Elizabeth Lutes.

Cathie Breidenbach of West Bloomfield teaches college writing classes and works as a freelance writer.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Francis Loud (left), Corinne Barringer and Nancy Brassert are in the cast of St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook's production of "The Elephant Man."

upcoming things to do

• **'Elephant Man'**
St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook will present "The Elephant Man," a true account of the life of John Merrick, at 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday,

March 23-24, 30-31, and Thursday-Saturday, April 5-7, at the playhouse in Bloomfield Hills. Veteran St. Dunstan's player Tom Peterson stars as Merrick. For tickets at \$8 adults, \$5

students, call 644-0527.

• **More Upcoming calendar items on Page 8C.**

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