

Entertainment

Keely Wygonik editor/953-2105



Thursday, March 10, 1992 (16)

Lots of razzmatazz Cast shines in 'Barnum'

Performances of the the Ridge-dale Players production of "Barnum" continue through March 29 at the playhouses in Troy. For ticket information, call 644-8328.

The Ridge-dale Players production of "Barnum," directed by Kent Martini and Bill Glaes plays well despite Cy Coleman's thin script.

The savvy 61-year-old troupe manages to give theatergoers a night of razzmatazz. It's wall to wall cloths, balloons, bearded ladies, tumblers, trapeze artists, flags, fireworks, the Bridgeport Pageant Choir, confetti and lots of inventive lyrics by Michael Stewart.

The mild overtones of Mark Twain's world and Frank Baum's "Wizard of Oz" add a necessary ingredient, a bit of salt to this musical biography about the famous P.T. who founded "The Greatest Show on Earth."

Stephen Tadevic gives us an energetic Phineas Taylor Barnum. Tadevic is surprisingly swift on his feet; he's a good dancer as well as fast talker. One of the best numbers in the show is "The Prince of Humbug," and Tadevic pulls the show together while giving his all to this terrific song.

He's believable as the dreamer who built the successful American museum in 1851 and went on to found a traveling circus after the museum burned down in 1852.

Holly Hellsten is equally believable as the downhearted high school teacher, Chairy Barnum. P.T. needed a wife who kept her wits about her, and Chairy's tart words



Helen Zucker

and clear vision help make P.T.'s dreams reality.

Hellsten has a lovely voice, and she and Tadevic do a moving rendition of "The Colors of My Life." We feel Barnum's loss when his priceless wife dies, and understand that the three-ring-circus as America knew it might not have existed if James A. Bailey hadn't convinced Barnum to fill his late years with work.

MARK HAMMILL, a great bear of a man — with a voice to match, does a splendid job as the Ringmaster, crying out acts from his niche at stage right while doing magic tricks, as the Concertmaster, and as the waltz-in James A. Bailey. Hammill is splendid, no matter who he's playing. He's the spirit of progress, the voice of the late 19th century.

Génie Garner is amusing as Jolice Beth, the 161-year-old woman. Garner doubles as a very nimble dancer/juggler. Mike Elbert is an amusing, robust Tom Thumb. Elbert uses great Cowardly Lion phrasing in his "Bigger Isn't Better" number. Kasee Stegeman is gorgeous and funny as Jenny Lind, who becomes Barnum's mistress for six months. "The Swedish Nightingale," a name

ironically dreamed up by Chairy Barnum, is glorious and stiff as she sings the "Jenny Lind Obligation." Stegeman gives us a Lind who moves believably to the French Ambassador on the night Barnum goes home to Chairy.

Lori Jacobs is wonderful as the blues singer who gives us "Black and White." Julie Klock-Tillotson is efficient as Lyman, Barnum's faithful helper. Carl Teritto is a sober Amos Scudder, co-founder of the American Museum.

Kudos to producer Donna Backus who put together the "cast" of thousands, the terrific costumes, and the great special effects, including popcorn for 10 cents. And to Jody Lavin for fine choreography, Robin Kearney and Chick Hay for the set, and to music director Kerry Price, his piano and to the orchestra, Dan Gardner, Don Martin, David Coleman and Eric Shea.

Don't miss the museum show in the lounge during intermission.

Helen Zucker has many years' experience reviewing for newspapers and magazines in Michigan, New York and Massachusetts.



Steve Tadevic and Troy's Holly Hellsten co-star in Ridge-dale Players' production of the circus musical "Barnum."

Oakland University's 'West Side Story' exceptional

Performances of the Oakland University Department of Music, Theatre and Dance production of "West Side Story" continue through April 5 at the Studio Theatre in Varner Hall on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call the center's box office at 976-3013.

If you have yet to see the stage version of "West Side Story," the Oakland University Department of Music, Theatre and Dance provides an excellent opportunity with a quality interpretation of the Broadway legend.

Director Michael Gillespie and choreographer Gregory A. Patterson lead their talented cast and crew in a classic production filled with passion, anger and sadness.

Arthur Laurents' book is based on

a modern "Romeo and Juliet" (although "modern" is now nostalgic) where race is the basis of the families who hate one another. The dissent and jazzy music is Leonard Bernstein's, the book is Arthur Laurents' and the lyrics are Stephen Sondheim's.

Tony (Romeo) is played by Corey Skaggs who sings "Maria" as though he were really in love. The object of Tony's love, Maria (Juliet), is played by Amy Haecker.

SKAGGS AND Haecker sing as a team. Although the traditional favorite and best-known, "Tonight," is performed beautifully, the true triumph of their performance is "One Hand, One Heart" which, in this production, became the foundation for these characters' brief happiness.

Some people were meant to be on stage. Betsy Counts (Anita) possesses



Sally Dubats

a rare star quality and is a true entertainer. Counts' full voice takes command of the stage. She demonstrates genuine rage during "A Boy Like That" (after her husband has just been killed), yet can't flout it when Anita is "gonna get her kicks tonight."

The reason for hate is conflict between gangs, the Jets (all-purpose American boys) and the Sharks (Puerto Rican immigrants). Leading the Jets is Riff, played by Brett Alan Carroll.

Allen J. Verschuere (Action), Joe Bailey (Big Deal) and Derek Berger (Uno) bring to life gang members who stand out as individuals to make the show a success. Each carries with him a strong sense of personal style as each nickname implies.

THE JETS are fully extended, and it is fun to watch their antics during "Get Officer Krupke," and they really are cool during Joe Bailey's "Cool." Stephanie Woodman as Anybody's, a wannabe Jet, is a perfect tomboy with a snappy acting style and movement.

The chorus Jet women carry with them a sleazy "we're better than you" attitude, and win the talent war between the gangs, as the chorus

Shark women flank the enthusiastic test during high-energy numbers such as "America" and "I Feel Pre-tu."

Scenic designer Peter W. Hicks has created a truly serviceable set and solved the problem of multiple and complicated scenes with the use of one set and revolving upstage walls. Cat walks provide extra space and fifty places for scenes, and sea-folding makes the set actually "rumble" during the rumble.

Sally Dubats of Southfield is an actress, director and teacher, who teaches at community theaters in the metropolitan area. She is artistic director of West End Productions headquartered in Southfield.

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