

Why did company bother to start this show at all?

By Helen Zucker
special writer

After three strong, exciting productions in a row, how could Meadow Brook Theatre end the season on such a low note?

"Starting Here, Starting Now" is the weakest show I have seen anywhere this year. The script is totally lacking in connective tissue, despite the fact that its creators claim, "the emotions explored are very much in touch with the present tense."

The production runs through May 17 on the Oakland University Campus near Rochester.

I take it lyricist Richard Maltby Jr. and composer David Shire think they are writing songs about contemporary life. Most of the songs are senseless, flip, or nostalgic for a '50s world that never really existed.

The lyrics are trendy, forgettable and sometimes sound like sociological jargon. Maybe this kind of revue works in a restaurant (where this show made its debut), but it doesn't work in a large theater.

Most of the time the cast seems to be vaguely complaining about the quality of its rather privileged life. This is a nervous, sad, terribly safe musical.

I kept wishing for a rock number or a good song that had really clever lyrics about having a midlife crisis. (I couldn't help thinking the authors must've been exchanging views on their midlife crises while writing this thing.)

Instead we get a maudlin number called "Flair," sung by Michael Scott, wherein Scott asks the audience where "the flair in his daily life has gone?" Scott renders this number with such a

review

total lack of flair that you wonder if he ever had any in his life or would recognize it if he did. "Flair" is used as the finale song by the company.

The company consists of three singers and three good backup musicians. Mary Gutzi, a dark-haired lady with a terrific voice, is totally wasted in this lackluster show.

Ms. Gutzi has luster enough to hold a stage on her own — given material worth listening to. She does an incredible job with a song about being left to do the "Crossword Puzzle" while her man has gone off with a dumb floozie on a vacation cruise.

The lyrics are difficult to get one's tongue around, yet Ms. Gutzi never misses a beat or runs a word together. Too bad the song winds up telling us: "Girls, if you want to keep your man, be dumb, have a tiny vocabulary and leave the crossword puzzle for him."

I found it hard to believe I was listening to such stuff in 1981. Ms. Gutzi should've been singing, "I'm gonna wash that man right outta my hair!" Barbara Heuman, a blonde ball of energy, is also wasted. She tries her best to infuse the material with a vitality it simply hasn't got. Ms. Heuman looks dizzy with unused energy.

She's frantic to be funny in, "I'm going to make you beautiful," a song about a lady selling cosmetics in Bloomingdale's (where else?).

She flings colored powders about the stage, dabs her breasts with powder, carries on like a frenzied cook. Sorry, it

just isn't a funny song no matter what she does.

Ms. Heuman does a nice job on the soft, pretty song in the show, "Autumn." All the fake frenzy about nothing comes to halt for this moment, the lights go out, one spot shines on Ms. Heuman sitting quietly, singing about the season.

"Autumn" is the only number that isn't in the "present tense," and it's a nice respite. It's over too fast.

The song is followed by Michael Scott, a good looking young man, singing something about not remembering Christmas. Scott looks like he has been shanghaied from the chorus of "Mame" and wishes he were back there. He stays in tune, but his voice is totally lacking in excitement, range or magic.

Well, to be fair, there isn't any magic in this thin, musical revue. The best that can be said is that Barbara Heuman looks good in a top hat, and I wish she and Ms. Gutzi good parts in "South Pacific" or something worth singing.

Peter-William Hicks has got up a great set for a nightclub.

correction

St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook will present the musical "Mack & Mabel" at 9 p.m. May 29-31 and June 4-6 at the outdoor Greek Theatre of Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills.

The performance dates were incorrectly given in the April 27 issue of the Birmingham, West Bloomfield and Troy Eccentrics.

Light Opera's 'Fiddler'

Willie Grove (left) is Sasha, a Russian singer; Fred Shulak is Lazar Wolf, the butcher; and Katie Grove is Tzeitel in the musical "Fiddler on the Roof," to be presented by the Windsor Light Opera Association, Inc., weekends May 1-17 at Cleary Auditorium in Windsor. Grove is a Birmingham resident, in business with a Troy firm; Shulak is a Southfield veterinarian; and Ms. Grove is a

Birmingham resident. Performances are at 8:15 p.m. May 1-2, 8-9 and 16 and at 2 p.m. May 3, 10 and 17. Tickets are \$6.50 for Fridays, \$7.50 for Saturdays and \$6 and \$6.50 for Sundays. The box office is open from noon to 5 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays at 395 Tecumseh Road, W., Windsor, phone 519-252-6455.

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