

Energetic show deserves seeing

By Barbara Michaels
special writer

"Mack and Mabel" is a toe-tapping extravaganza, a dandy musical pre-empted with flair, zest and enormous creativity by St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook.

Featuring music and lyrics by Jerry Herman of "Hello, Dolly!" fame, "Mack and Mabel" concludes its run at 8 p.m. Friday-Sunday at the outdoor Greek Theatre on the grounds of Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills.

"Mack" is Mack Sennett, the Hollywood producer-director who gave the world the Keystone Kops, Bathing Beauties, and curdled pies in the face. "Mabel" is Mabel Normand, Sennett's most famous female comedy star and his on-again, off-again real-life romance.

review

Ed Guest and Dianne Mather Ryding are outstanding in the title roles, and they are backed by a first-rate production company. Supporting players, choreography, musical direction, choreography, costuming and sets are all excellent. St. Dunstan's spring musicals are always lavish, but this time producer Barbara Gowans and director Nancy Reasner have pulled out all the stops to give "Mack and Mabel" the aura of a Broadway show.

GUEST BRINGS great energy to the role of the dictatorial, rough-edged

Sennett. He narrates the show as a series of flashbacks detailing his career and romance with Mabel. Some scenes are shown both as they really were and as Sennett's hindsight now wishes they had been.

Among Guest's bouncy musical numbers are "Movies Were Movies," a lament for the golden days of silent; "I Won't Send Roses," a warning to Mabel of his shortcomings as a lover; "I Wanna Make the World Laugh," the driving force of Sennett's life; "Hundreds of Girls," the story behind his famed Bathing Beauties; and "I Promise You a Happy Ending," a lament that real life isn't always as happy as the movies.

Ms. Ryding exudes warmth and charm as Mabel. Transformed overnight from delicatessen waitress to world-wide star, she happily belts out "Look What Happened to Mabel!" Teaming with Guest and the company for several other musical numbers, her fine voice is enhanced by some graceful dance steps.

Keith Lepard is marvelously oily as William Desmond Taylor, Sennett's rival in Hollywood and in Mabel's affections. Taylor's unsolved murder shocked the public and raised a cloud of suspicion over Mabel from which she was never able to emerge.

Fran Hayes is a spunky Lottie, Sennett's second leading lady. Her vocal talents, except in "Big Time" and "Tap Your Troubles Away."

JIM STERNER is likeable as Wally,

Sennett's leading man with a perpetual grin; and John Stark is convincing as Frank, Sennett's writer with a crush on Mabel. Jim Brooks and Norris Andersen make an amusing team as Kleinman and Fox, Sennett's hardheaded financial backers.

Clever production numbers feature two large playground slides for the Bathing Beauties, a hilariously ramshackle paddy wagon for the Keystone Kops, actual footage from Sennett comedies, and a specially filmed silent movie featuring Lepard and Ms. Ryding in character.

The Keystone Kops number "Hit Em on the Head" is a slapstick delight, as is a free-for-all pie-throwing sequence that has the audience roaring.

The show is well-paced, and the large cast of extras is well rehearsed. A 12-piece orchestra conducted by musical director Margie Brooks provides excellent accompaniment throughout.

Debbie Cragin's choreography works well and includes some impressive high-kicking chorus lines. Sari Frey's costuming is attractive and effective. Scene designer Fritz Fienelmann ingeniously handles numerous scene changes and deserves special credit for the above-mentioned paddy wagon and a handsome pullman set.

WHY THIS charming musical failed on Broadway is something of a mystery, except that it opened during a newspaper strike.

"Mack and Mabel" has great freshness and vitality.

Thursday, June 4, 1981

(S-9B,F-3D,R-11N)O17C

table talk

"THE THURSDAY Thaw" is a new warm-weather activity at Restaurant Duglass in Southfield. An evening of ballroom dancing for singles and couples, the program will begin June 11 and continue through the summer.

The Carmichael Cooler, a tropical drink named after the bar manager, Peter Carmichael, will be among summer drinks offered for \$1. Couples will move to the music of John Williams's band, playing through the summer, at the restaurant's Brasserie.

Music for dancing will be offered from 5:30-11 p.m. Happy Hour cocktails are served from 5:30-7:30. The band will accept the tunes of the '30s and big-band '40s, with Cole Porter ballads and Benny Goodman jazz.

There's room for about 50 dancers in the Brasserie, which accommodates 110 persons.

"THE FRIDAY Fish Feast" and "The Sunday Supper" are attractions for diners at the Troy Hil-

ton. The Fish Feast runs from 6-11 each Friday at the Haymarket. Reservations are a must; it's sold out by Wednesday.

An all-you-can-eat feast, it features steamed whole Maine lobster, Alaskan king crab, shrimp and oysters on ice and an array of smoked cold and pickled fish, as well as steamship round of beef, barbeque ribs, Greek spinach pie, full salad bar and baked breads.

Live entertainment completes the package, at \$19.95 per person.

The Sunday Supper, from 1-7 p.m., offers made-to-order dishes, along with hot and cold entrees, and a centerpiece of raw vegetables. Again, it's all you can eat.

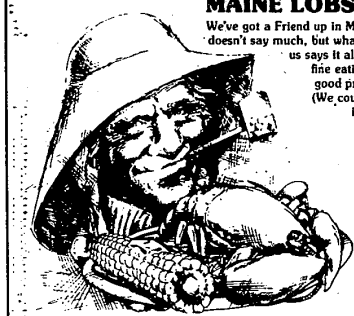
Based on a concept popularized in Chicago and San Francisco, the supertime setting is one for leisure — relaxing, reading the paper, playing backgammon. Free copies of the Sunday New York Times are provided and the use of backgammon boards. Live entertainment is by the Jim Dixon Trio.

— Ethel Simmons

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