

Musical 'Nunsense' is a punderful show

Performances of the Birmingham Theatre production of "Nunsense" continue through Sunday, March 8. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-3333.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

"Nunsense" is divine fun. This musical high jinks at the Birmingham Theatre is full of spirited tunes, outrageous puns ("Nunsense" is habit-forming) and exhilarating performances by its five actresses.

Only the filmiest of plots surrounds Dan Guggin's wonderful music and lyrics. When 52 of their order succumb to botulism from a new soup recipe by Sister Julia, Child of God, the Little Sisters of Hoboken (known as "Little Hobos") have only enough money to bury 48.

Thus they stage a talent show to "clean out the freezer" and defeat the four "blue nuns."

Peggy Cass is delightful as Sr. Mary Regina, the Mother Superior who must maintain constant vigilance over her frivolous subordinates. No shrinking violet herself, Mother Superior belts out "Turn Up the Spotlight" and "Just a Couple's Sisters" as well as joining in the chorus of several other rousing tunes.

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PERT MARCIA Lewis is glorious as Sr. Mary Hubert, trainer of novitiates. As "No. 2" she does indeed try harder — to undermine Mother Superior and nearly steal the show. With her nasal twang and twinkling eyes full of devilry, Lewis radiates

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good-natured mischief. Her powerful voice adds lustre to "The Biggest Ain't the Best," the duet "Just a Couple's Sisters," and the hand-clapping, foot-stomping "Holler Than Thou."

Helen Baldassare is highly engaging as Sr. Mary Annalisa, a good-natured bubbler who lost her memory after a crucifix fell on her. Baldassare mugs less than predecessors in this role and is therefore more credible. She leads the audience through a quiz on the history of the order, rewarding correct responses with prizes that seem to have come from a box of Catholic Cracker Jacks, if there were such things.

Sr. Mary Annalisa is also the mischief-maker behind Sr. Mari Onetta, a hilariously outspoken hand puppet, who tells it like it is in "So You Want to Be a Nun." In addition, Baldassare's vocal talent shines in "I Could've Gone to Nashville."

As Sr. Robert Anne, the street-wise nun, Angelina Fiorellini has an expressive face and an effective sardonic delivery. Her outstanding voice belts out "Playing Second Fiddle" and "I Just Want to Be a Star" and so forth for the ballad "Growing Up Catholic."



Barbara Michals

Barbara Michals teaches high school English and journalism in Southfield. A theater critic for the last 13 years, she is an inveterate player who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

Valerie De Pena is pleasing as Sr. Mary Leo, the dancing novitiate. Somewhat confused between her show business and religious aspirations, she sings "Benedicite" to her teddy bear and dances a wonderfully hammed-up "Dying Nun" ballet.

Though "Nunsense" was originally conceived to play in a more intimate setting, the Birmingham production adapts beautifully to the bigger stage and house. The nuns still circulate among the audience at every opportunity, and James Lillie's well-designed sound system ensures that the offstage lines get heard.

Multi-talented Guggin directs the show as well, and everything runs smoothly. Felton Smith's musical staging and choreography are fine, and Barry Artell's set is an appropriate and amusing hodge-podge.

NIGHT OUT

The Poole Band, a Michigan rock 'n' roll group, will play from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 19, at the Bates Street Night Out at the Community House in Birmingham. The monthly evening of socializing and live entertainment, is \$5 per person. Tickets may be reserved by calling 644-5832. Tickets also will be available at the door.

TROPHY LOUNGE

Saxman Larry Nozoe opened this week at the Trophy Lounge at the Troy Hilton Inn, where he will perform from 8 p.m. to midnight Wednesday-Thursday and 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Friday-Saturday. The alto saxophonist has been featured in the Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival every year since the festival began in 1979.

OPEN AUDITIONS

Auditions for singers for two musical productions will be held from 7-10 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, Feb. 12-13, at Meadow Brook Theatre on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. Eighteen singers, approximately ages 15-30, are needed for "Harrison Loved His Umbrella" described as a musical cartoon by composer Stanley Hollingsworth. To audition, call the Department of Music, Theatre and Dance at 370-2030.

CHILDREN'S PLAY

Henry K. Martin's Actor's Trunk Company of Birmingham will present the theater classic for children "Rumpelstiltskin" at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 14, at the Community Arts Auditorium at the Michigan State Fairgrounds in Detroit. Tickets are available in advance at the box office, open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tickets also will be available at the door. For group sales call 557-1228.

MALL CONCERT

Borkowski and Rochochacki will give a concert from 2-4 p.m. Feb. 22 in the free Sunday series at Somerset Mall in Troy. The musical duo currently appears Wednesdays and Saturdays at the Hurling Green in Rochester Hills, Thursdays at Four Green Fields in Royal Oak and Fridays at Woodbridge Tavern in Detroit's Rivertown area.

SPY CAPER

Hugh Whittemore's "Pack of Lies," a drama based on a 1950 Soviet spy caper in England, will open a four-week run at Meadow Brook Theatre at 8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 26, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. New York actress Jane Lowry will play the English housewife faced with the dilemma of whether to betray her best friend or her country. Also in the cast are Carl Schurr, Sherryann Kaledjian, Arthur Beer, Jeanne Arnold, Will Love, Jayne Houdyshell, and Tyne Turner, daughter of Will-O-Way Theatre's artistic director, Celia Merrill Turner. Terence Kilburn, Meadow Brook Theatre artistic director, will direct the production. For ticket information call the box office at 377-3300.

COMEDY CLUB

Comedy magic by Jeff Hobson, illusionist and comedian, will be presented Friday, Feb. 13, at Crusado's Club, a new comedy club in Allen Park. Upcoming entertainment also includes Ruben-Ruben as the master of ceremonies for Marty Micoli and Bill Thomas on Friday, March 6, and Geechie Guy and Tim Lilly on Friday, March 13. There are two shows nightly, at 9 and 10:30 p.m. For reservations call 396-1300.

DRAMA REVIVAL

In celebration of National Women's History Month, in March, the Actors Alliance Theatre Company of Southfield will revive the critically acclaimed 1983 production of Nancy Beckett's "The Women Here Are No Different." The play follows six women from different walks of life as they reconstruct their lives at a shelter for abused women. Performances will be given Wednesday-Sundays, March 11-22, at Smith Theatre on the Oakland University College Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills. The performances will be a benefit for the Women Center on campus. To order tickets call the Actors Alliance at 642-1526.



Musical duo Borkowski and Rochochacki perform at several taverns in the metro area and also have a concert coming up at Somerset Mall.

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