

Avon Players 'Guys and Dolls' is just great

Performances of the Avon Players production of the musical "Guys and Dolls" continue through Saturday, May 28, at the playhouse in Avon Township. For ticket information, call 650-1130.

By Frank Hursley
special writer

Avon Players is completing its 40th anniversary season with an outstanding production of "Guys and Dolls," musical version of the Damon Runyon story largely set on Broadway.

Dedicated to community theater for 40 years is something special and calls for something extraordinary by way of celebration. With this rousing production the Avon Players has delivered.

The area has been saturated by various productions of "Guys and Dolls" recently, as if the play was a newly discovered Nell Simon comedy. That being said, it's hard to imagine that there is not a living moment. The Avon Players production is a substantial notch above what is expected from community theater. The group will bow out of its anniversary season retaining the memory of an exceptionally fine accomplishment.

Margie Montross is director, as well as choreographer. Even with

numerous scene changes, the show's pace and balance is lively, smooth flowing, with great attention to style.

The music of "Guys and Dolls" endures with an infectious quality and probably explains the play's popularity with audiences.

FRANK LOESSER provided the music and lyrics, while the book was created by the team of Jo Sweeney and Abe Burrows. Romance, unlawful floating crap games, nightclubs, and a Salvation Army mission bent on saving sinners all share the light-hearted comedy about a group of colorful characters.

The players have capitalized on the material, and there are numerous energetic song-and-dance routines and straight scenes that convey the inherent gaiety of the show. The ever-versatile Becky McElroy portrays a perky, naive Adelaid who one passion is to get a positive commitment, rather than a

wry sensibility.

Another level of romance, this one of a more serious nature and tenderly presented, concerns Sarah Brown, a determined sex symbol played by Jo Benders and Sue Mays. The ill-tempered gambler played by Timothy Lentz, Bender and Lentz team as an engaging couple delivering some captivating duets.

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Frank Hursley of Birmingham, a sales engineer by profession, is a longtime theater buff.



Frank Hursley

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Bob Welbel

'Tom Sawyer' cast filled with energy

Performances of the First Theatre Guild production of the musical "Tom Sawyer" continue at 8 p.m. Friday and 2 p.m. Saturday at Knox Auditorium of the First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham. For ticket information, call 833-9032 or 540-5943.

By Bob Welbel
special writer

Mark Twain's adventures of "Tom Sawyer" has been adapted by a number of playwrights. There is even a version with music, which is the current offering of the First Theatre Guild at the First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham.

Opening night, it was an energetic but something-less-than-polished production.

Quality in this case, however, is not the whole story.

To paraphrase a note in the program, purpose of the FTG is the study and presentation of dramatic art to promote a better understanding of spiritual truths and provide Christian fellowship. It's not unusual, the group says, to find whole families involved, which a parent of the program attests.

Tom Sawyer serves this purpose well. Among other things, it presents Tom with the moral dilemma of protecting himself from the wrath of Injun Joe or preventing an innocent man from being convicted of murder.

Unfortunately, the dramatic impact of Tom's decision is lost in the trial scene, because he is almost hid-

A final kudo goes to Bernona Fry and her costume crew. The costumes are generally well done — especially the young women's.

Best musical moments are the chorals numbers with Hildy Tyson's able accompaniment on the piano.

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further extension of her 14-year engagement, from Nathan Detroit.

Nathan prefers a status quo relationship as he is more preoccupied in settling crap games. Nick Dafoe ends the game with a bang, with a delightful comic finish that also works well as a foil to Adelaide's

game. They combine for some first-rate choruses and numbers, and at times, share the stage with quick-stepping entertainers at the Hot Box Club.

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