

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



Thursday, May 26, 1988 O&E

0716



Lorna Luft is saloon singer Kate Fothergill in a revival of George Gershwin's musical hit "Girl Crazy" at the Birmingham Theatre. In the "I Got Rhythm" number, Kate is joined by the

Dudeens, at the dude ranch. The girls are Lucille Nasr (left), Gail Cook Howell, Patricia Pickering, Holly Irwin, Trish Gorman, and Jennifer Thoraby who, with the show, returns to her home-

town of Birmingham. Thoraby plays the role of Tess Parker, ex-girlfriend of an exiled New York playboy.

She's got rhythm

Lorna Luft stars in role that brought Merman fame

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

RED-HEADED Lorna Luft was low-key — her eyes still looking sleepy — one morning last week when she talked about her new show, over breakfast at Birmingham's Midtown Cafe.

When fruit plates arrived, ordered by others at the table for their early lunch, she declared, "That's too healthy for me!" And with gusto, Luft dug into her own big meal of two poached eggs on English muffins, along with hash browns.

Luft had a heavy rehearsal and performance schedule of the George and Ira Gershwin musical "Girl Crazy," which opened in previews last week at the Birmingham Theatre. Regular performances began Friday and continue through Sunday, June 19.

"Audiences are going wild. They love this show," she said. It's not a revival of the musical as first presented back in 1930. "It has been rewritten. The original was much too long, with too many subplots."

Kate Fothergill, "the role that made Ethel Merman a star," she said. In the show Luft gets to sing the song that became so closely identified with Merman — "I Got Rhythm" — as well as "Sam and Delilah" and "Boy, What Love Has Done to Me."

Was "I Got Rhythm" a tough song to do? she was asked. "The song was easy, the tap was tough," she replied.

Luft worked in Atlantic City, appearing at the Trump Casino, at the same time she was rehearsing "Girl Crazy" in New York. "I did two shows a night in Atlantic City, then got on a helicopter to fly into New York and rehearse 'Girl Crazy' in the daytime. And my last show was at 2 a.m."

Since arriving in Birmingham, "I still haven't had a day off," she said last Thursday. Luft was dressed casually in a red San Diego Zoo sweatshirt with a panda on it. She also wore sweat pants and athletic shoes.

Her short red hair was aggressively tousled, and she looked attractive even without her makeup. She didn't want to bother to put it on that morning, so had asked not to be photographed.

IN "GIRL CRAZY," she plays a saloon singer, the part that was written for Merman. Kate's husband, Slick, runs a gambling casino at the Arizona ranch that has been transformed into a dude ranch by an exiled New York playboy.

"My costumes are gorgeous," Luft said. "I make my entrance in a white suit with fur. For 'I Got Rhythm,' I wear a pink saloon dress with feath-

ers. And I have a black dressing gown with more feathers."

"In the second act, I wear a teal blue slip for 'Samson and Delilah.' I wear a Ginger Rogers dance dress with feathers at the bottom for the number 'Treat Me Rough.' I have a bright red, silver-fringed outfit near the end of the show, which is mine. I had it in my closet. It was just sort of perfect for the show."

She said originally she appeared in the scene in "a gorgeous black suit. But everyone else is in Western gear. So the costume was changed. That's why we come to rehearsals."

Luft and her husband, producer-songwriter Jake Hooker, have been married for 13 years and have a 4-year-old son, Jesse Cole (after Cole Porter). Hooker has written songs for "Rocky IV" and "Top Gun." She

said she and Hooker never work together. "That's why we've been married 13 years."

THE TWO FIRST met in New York when she was 15, and he was living with Peter Allen's sister (Luft's sister, Liza Minnelli, who is 7 years older, was married to Allen).

Please turn to Page 12

'Girl Crazy' a show to go crazy over

Performances of "Girl Crazy" continue through Sunday, June 19, at the Birmingham Theatre. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-3533.

You'd have to be crazy not to be crazy about "Girl Crazy." The Birmingham Theatre's revival of this vintage Gershwin musical is a sure crowd-pleaser. It is almost impossible to leave the theater without those wonderful tunes resounding for days. Headliner Lorna Luft and the rest of the talented cast make it all great fun.

While successful musicals today are lucky to claim one hit song, "Girl Crazy" has four classics that have withstood well the test of time since the show debuted 58 years ago: "Embraceable You," "I Got Rhythm," "But Not For Me" and "Blidin' My Time." Most of the show's lesser-known numbers are delightful as well.

The breezy boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-gets-girl plot is no sillier than that of other '30s musicals and even more plausible than some other famous shows of the period.



Barbara Michals

Wealthy New York playboy Danny Churchill (Guy Stroman) has been exiled by his father to the family ranch in Custerville, Ariz. While Danny turns the forlorn property into a successful dude ranch and im-

ports some of his Eastern pals, he falls head-over-tumbleweed for the local postgirl, Molly Gray (Liz Larsen).

Please turn to Page 12

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