

Musical jewel needs a little polish



BARBARA MICHALS

"Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," the season opener at the Birmingham Theatre, is disappointing and lackluster despite Julie Syne music, porky Stella Parton as its star, and some good supporting talent.

This is a revival of the 1949 hit musical, adapted from Anita Loos's popular 1925 novel about two chorus girls who set out for Paris in the Roaring 1920s hoping to find rich husbands and acquire lots of jewels. The current production is the first step on a national tour.

To make this kind of fluffy potpourri piece work takes enormous panache and a good dash of camp. Director Jeffrey Moss has failed to give the show either one, or anything else distinctive.

The script is rife with cornball one-liners with proper timing and delivery, but on opening night nearly all ended up as throwaways that garnered only an occasional isolated chuckle. An Lorelei Lee, the gold-digging "little girl from Little Rock," Parton wisely chose not to imitate her famous predecessors — Carol Channing, who originated the stage role, and Marilyn Monroe, who starred in the 1953 film version. Parton stresses Lorelei's origins as a country girl. This works to good advantage in "Just a Little Girl from Little Rock," when Lorelei reminisces about her roots, but does nothing to enhance Lorelei's characterization

"GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES"

Theater: Birmingham Theatre, 211 S. Woodward, Birmingham. Curtain time: Performances 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sundays, 2 p.m. Wednesdays, and Thursdays, Oct. 14 through Oct. 17.

Tickets: Range from \$20 to \$35. Senior, ages 60 and older, and group discounts for 20 or more, available. Call 644-3533 or Ticketmaster, 645-6666 for information. Call 644-3576 for group ticket information.



Madcap musical: Stella Parton and the cast of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" playing at the Birmingham Theatre through Oct. 17.

REVIEW

the rest of the time.

Lorelei Lee is one of the great creations in musical-comedy history, a larger-than-life character whose enduring fame surpassed that of the show from which she came. Parton is cute and spunky and can belt out a rousing "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" (though her fast tempo obliterates a lot of the song's wonderfully clever lyrics), but there is nothing about her Lorelei that justifies the character's stupefying irresistibility to men.

The second leads, Catherine Hart as Lorelei's pal Dorothy, and James Kampf as Henry Spofford, her adoring swain, do a very pleasing duet of "You Say You Care."

Hart's rich, booming voice adds zest to all her numbers even

though her character's personality comes across as way too bland.

As Gus, Lorelei's persistent suitor, Dennis St. Pierre is fine singing the charming "Bye Bye Baby" and looks comically distraught at all the appropriate times.

J. Nathan Oswald, playing fitness fanatic Josephus Gage, does an amusing "I'm Attila, I'm Aglow," a nice improvement from his stiff appearance earlier.

As Mrs. Spofford, Henry's mother, Treasure Ford is an unconvincing drunk, but shines when she lets loose in the Charleston number.

Veteran comic Phil Ford disappears as the bumbling Lord Beekman, sometimes mauling his lines into a dreadful-looking white beard.

Choreographer Don Percossi's work finally meshes in the Charleston number at the end of Act II, the complete antithesis of the opening number when dancers seemed uncertain, ill-timed, and in danger of crashing into one another.

With some notable exceptions for Parton and everyone in the final scene, costumes tend toward tacky, though some simple sets function well enough.

Overall, this production of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," needs a major touch-up at its roots.

Barbara Michals, a theater critic for the last 20 years, is an inveterate playgoer who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

Note upcoming concerts

Here are some upcoming concerts to note on your calendar.

The Rochester Symphony Orchestra opens its 33rd season 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 8, at Varner Hall on the campus of Oakland University with a program entitled "Sounds Diverse" that will feature the music of J.S. Bach, Felix Mendelssohn, and Zoltan Kodaly.

Tickets \$12, children under 12, \$8 and may be purchased at the door or university at Janet Varner's on Main Street in Rochester, or the CD Warehouse in the North Hill Shopping Plaza. Season tickets available for \$60, students/seniors \$55. For more information, call 651-4181.

The Vivace Series of Birmingham Temple will open its 17th season 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 9 at the temple, 28611 W. 12 Mile in Farmington Hills, with a concert presented by Claudia Schmidt. She plays the 12-string guitar, the moun-

tain dulcimer, and the deluxe pianola. She infuses her concerts with anecdotes and poetry. Call 647-4632 or 288-3953 for ticket information. The temples Dinner Club will host a meal before the concert. Call 357-7746 for details and reservations.

Paint Creek Folklore Society presents its first Comfy Concert of the season 7 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 10 at the Rochester Hills home of Phil and Althea Doolittle. Tickets are \$8. For reservations, call 376-2513.

The concert will feature singer/songwriter Carla Scialy and guitarist Robert Gerics of Rochester Hills. Concerts are also scheduled Nov. 14, March 13 and April 10.

Chamberworks presents Giants of the German Baroque, 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 16 at Christ Church Cranbrook — Guild Hall, 450 Church Road, Bloomfield Hills. Reservations recommended, call 643-7788.

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