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Brass Appeal

Garland Summer Musicals opens its season with an entertaining *The Music Man*.

by Perry Stewart

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If your most recent exposure to *The Music Man* was the ludicrously miscast 2003 television movie, Garland Summer Musicals has the perfect antidote. GSM's new staging of this beloved classic, arguably the best-ever American musical, is bright, sassy and loads of fun. Director Buff Shurr fills the stage with hordes of performers, and conductor Jeff Crouse does tuneful justice to Meredith Willson's masterwork.

The special challenge in any revival of this show is the title role. Professor Harold Hill, the itinerant con man who beguiles the citizens of River City, Iowa, is so identified with Robert Preston, the Broadway and first big-screen movie Hill, that subsequent actors usually suffer by comparison. Craig Bierko addressed the problem in a 2000 Broadway staging by crafting a portrayal that many felt was a near-impersonation of Preston.

Garland's Harold Hill, however, makes the role his own, even though it's contrary to type. Stan Graner reminds you more of James Stewart than Robert Preston. If this means a shortage of bluster on "Trouble," it works to Graner's advantage on "Till There Was You."

The professor's scam is to organize a boys' band to save the youth of River City from worldly evils. He sells the parents uniforms and instruments, promising to teach the boys how to play. He knows nothing about music, however, so he typically skips town before the first class.

Harold Hill was created for an actor who sings, and his numbers make more demands on acting than singing skills. (Willson wrote the character for his old pal from radio days, Phil Harris.) But Marian Paroo, the spinster music teacher and librarian who first opposes Hill, has to be classically trained. Jacquelyn Lengfelder delivers the vocal goods, bringing a soaring soprano to "Goodnight My Someone" and "My White Knight." When Graner joins her on "Till There Was You" lighting designer Susan A. White frames the couple in a halo-like aura. (Nice.)

James Williams, applauded a few Garland Civic Theatre seasons ago in the Jack Nicholson role in *A Few Good Men*, proves he's as adept at comedy as drama. Williams charges hilariously about the Granville Arts Center stage as Mayor Shinn, artfully butchering the English language as he seeks to discredit Hill.

As a melody trickster, composer Willson was beyond brilliant. "Goodnight My Someone" is a leisurely and wistful ballad. Then, in the very next scene, the tempo quickens and the same tune becomes the rousing "Seventy-Six Trombones." Counterpoint peppers the score, as in "Pickalittle," in which the mayor's wife (Melissa Tucker) leads a chorus of biddies.

In another clever twist, Professor Hill transforms the squabbling board of education into a barbershop quartet. R. Bradford Smith, Laurence Smith, Dennis Gullion and Steven E. Beene harmonize engagingly on "Lida Rose" and other numbers.

Willson even anticipated rap, so to speak, in "Rock Island." Don Long, as a Hill-hating anvil salesman, leads a pack of traveling salesmen on that opening salvo.

Choreographer Jeremy Dumont is on board with director Shurr's platoon system. But individual virtuosity isn't overlooked, as Stephen Raikes and Jill Nicholas demonstrate. Elsewhere, Marty Scott leads the youthful ensemble on "Shipooopi."

Nine-year-old Liam Taylor is small of frame and large of voice as Marian's shy little brother, who sings the praises of "Gary, Indiana," and fends off the attentions of Mary-Carolyn Sloan as the neighbor girl.

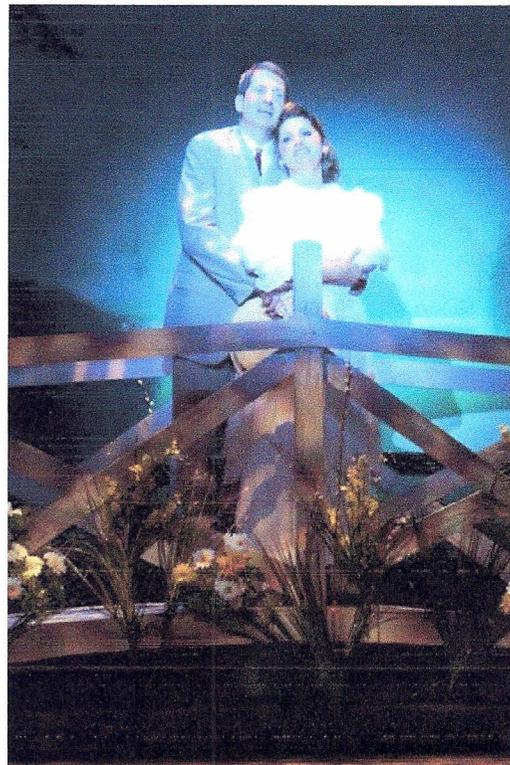


photo: Garland Summer Musicals

Stan Graner and Jacquelyn
Lengfelder

comes to life as William Shakespeare weaves his classic tale of two star-crossed lovers amidst a whirlwind of love, hate, jealousy, confusion, passion, comedy, and despair unraveled against the beauty and splendor of romantic Verona, Italy.

The production will run Friday through Sunday, August 26 – September 17, 2011 with Thursday performances on August 25 and September 1 at the Granville Arts Center, 300 North 5th Street in downtown Garland. Call the arts center box office at 972-205-2790 for tickets. All are \$22 which includes service fee. Discounts are available for KERA members and groups of 10 or more. Tickets for the preview on August 25 are \$17. Thursday performances are at 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday evenings are at 8:00 p.m., and matinees are at 2:30 p.m.

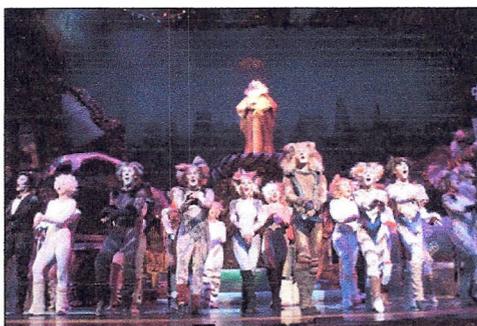
McClaran is directing the production with an outstanding cast which includes: Austen Anderson Gorney as Romeo; Ruby Westfall as Juliet; Bradford Smith as Friar Lawrence; Patrick Lynwood Henry as Lord Capulet; Marilyn Twyman as Lady Capulet; and Ryan M. Smith as Mercutio.

Other cast members are: Luke Meyer as Benvolio; Rogyne Gullledge as Nurse; Emily Reyna Hunt as Prince; Christian Whitley as Tybat; Schuyler Roper as Paris; Robert Long as Bathazar; Duncan Rogers as Lord Montaque; Courtney Murphy as Lady Montaque; Allison Block as Gregory; Samantha LaBrada as Abram; Michaela Cortes as Peter; and Megan Hudlow as friend of Tybalt. Some cast members will double in other roles as well.

Visit www.garlandcivictheatre.org or call 972-485-8884 for additional information.

GSM production of CATS: Theatre excellence

Kim Everett | July 23, 2011



Words like extraordinary and outstanding fall short in describing the Garland Summer Musicals' production of CATS. The popular Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, which first appeared on Broadway in 1982, is based on T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*.

Buff Shurr, who is in his 29th season with GSM, directs the show, and Mark Mullino serves as musical director and conductor. Paula Morelan is the choreographer and co-director.

The story takes place during the annual gathering of the "Jellicle Cats," during which Deuteronomy, the patriarch of the feline tribe, will choose one cat to ascend to the Heaviside Layer to be reborn. The entire show takes place on a single set, an old junkyard, which was designed by Kelly Cox and constructed by Joe Murdock along with a group of talented builders and painters. The design is intricate, and the detail is beautiful.

C. Nicholas Morris, a superb singer and dancer, is great in the role as Munkustrap, who serves as a narrator for the story. Shane Strawbridge ably portrays Old Deuteronomy, and Patty Granville brings a tear to the eye with her rendition of "Memory," in the role of Grizabella.

The show is filled with spectacular dancers, and it's difficult to remember another time when this many great ones have been together on one stage. The dancers are from well-known institutions such as the Dallas Black Dance Theatre II, Dallas Metropolitan Ballet Company, and Contemporary Ballet Dallas. They come from diverse backgrounds and training, and some have had experience dancing in theatres across the United States.

La Mar Brown, in his role as Mr. Mistoffelees, is an extraordinary dancer who creates impressive successions of spins and jumps. Michelle Renee Brown plays Victoria is a trained ballerina who started dancing at the age of 3.

Talented singers and dancers Lana Whittington and Stephen Raikes are wonderful as Rumpleteazer and Mungojerrie. Christine Phelan and Taylor McKie as Demeter and Bombalurina give a great song and dance performance in "Macavity." In addition, Hamp Holcomb turns in a wonderful performance as Gus: The Theatre Cat.

According to Granville, more than 150 dancers auditioned for the show and she couldn't be happier with the group.

Peggy and Don Durfey thoroughly enjoyed attending their first Garland Summer Musicals performance. "It was a very good show. I was really impressed with their voices and with the dancing," Peggy said. "It was an excellent production," Don added.

Jean Holmes was impressed with the production as well. "It may be the best thing I've ever seen here," she said. "The dancing was marvelous."



This GSM production far exceeds the "must see" category. Order tickets by calling the box office at 972-205-2790. The show will run through July 31 with performances on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays at the Granville Arts Center, Linda Brownlee Auditorium.