

Peninsula Players Theatre puts razzle dazzle into 'Chicago'

By Warren Gerds 6:46 AM, Jul 27, 2012

FISH CREEK — Peninsula Players Theatre pours extra oomph into this season's excursion into musical theater with a sharp version of "Chicago," complete with a snarky view of the 1920s that's easily translated to today.

The press is filled with notoriety, sensationalism and scandal. They're none too hard to find in two murderous women and their headline-creating lawyer who light up the shady goings on.

Roxie Hart has plugged her lover for attempting to walk out on her. Velma Kelly has plugged her sister and husband for answering to temptation. Billy Flynn, their lawyer, plays gullible reporters and the public like a silver-tongued devil.

The production rolls out glittery costumes, snappy dancing and a comically cynical attitude.

Company artistic director Greg Vinkler directs. That means everybody is "on" all the time with no waste of theatrical-style space.

The season's musical slot used to be a reach for the Players. Not so anymore in its upgraded stage house, and not so in productions like this that feature pros brought in primarily to pull off a show with pizzazz.

Two snappy newcomers to the Players are at the top. Jennifer Knox is Roxie, whose cutesy-pie veneer cloaks a heart that lusts for the sick-o kind of stardom. Ericka Mac is Velma, a wise one who is ever-calculating.

Players veteran Sean Fortunato is Billy, whose fast talking rises to spectacular heights in the richly comic ventriloquism with Roxie in "We Both Reached for the Gun."

Broadway legend Bob Fosse helped create this show, and that means dance is a factor through the choreography of Linda Fortunato. Among other key sections, the move-filled Mac leads the opening showcase of "All That Jazz," Knox and Mac team for flourishes in "My Own Best Friend" and Adam Estes, as Roxie's lover, is slick-nifty as Roxie takes the stand.

Among scenes played to entertaining effect are the sardonic "Class" with Velma and the jail matron (Rebecca Finnegan, also splashy in "When You're Good to Mama"), the quaint "A Little Bit of Good" by sweet reporter Mary Sunshine (Tom Mula) and the mock-maternal "Me and My Baby" with Roxie and four guys dancing in pink baby footsies that costumer Karin Simonson Kopsichke had special fun creating.

Fed up by this year of endless politics? This show through songs like Billy's ridiculing "Razzle Dazzle" serves as a relief valve for all sorts of hot air.



Musical review

Pictured: Jennifer Knox as Roxie Hart in Peninsula Players Theatre: "Chicago":

Through Aug. 12: 8 p.m.
Tuesday-Saturday, 7:30 p.m.
Aug. 5, 4 p.m. Aug. 12 at
Theatre-in-a-Garden, three
miles south of Fish Creek.
Running time 2½ hours. \$33-
\$39. (920) 868-3287.

★ ★ ★ ★ out of 4