

Smile: Port Summer Show's Musical on August 2, 3, 4, and 5 at Weber Auditorium

By David McCulloh

This summer, the stage and halls of Weber middle school have been filled with Contrasts, Contrapuntal Canticles, and the Cacophony of excited Contestants as the Port Summer Show (PSS) fast-forwards one-half century from its past recent shows set in the 1920s and '30s (*No No Nanette, State Fair* and *Anything Goes*) to this year's show, *Smile*, set in 1985, nearing the end of the last millennium. In the musical *Smile*, we see into the intricacies of a statewide teenage beauty pageant in Santa Rosa, CA. But it's not really a beauty pageant... It's the Young American Miss Pageant. The pageant selects a "typical high school senior" who "reaches for the stars but keeps her tennis shoes firmly planted in the rich soil of American tradition." *Smile* was nominated for a Tony award for best book in 1986, honoring its writer, Howard Ashman (*Little Shop of Horrors*, and the Disney productions *The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*). Music, composed by Marvin Hamlisch (*A Chorus Line* and *They're Playing Our Song*), provides the fast-paced tempo for the show, driving it from start to finish with heart-thumping lyrics juxtaposed with freely spoken dialogue and tender musical soliloquies.

What happens when 16 female contestants converge in a junior college auditorium for a pageant that is organized annually by a determined woman, who was, herself, a contestant 18 years earlier? Two parallel story lines emerge: the organizer's inner struggle to create the best pageant ever and the contestants' backstage antics - where both friendship and competition grow. While music fills the theater all night, the plot evolves backstage at the pageant.

Brenda Frelander (Caroline Pickering - *Urinetown* and *Mame* at Schreiber, *No No*

Nanette, State Fair) and her husband, Big Bob Frelander (Erik Schroeder - *No No Nanette, Anything Goes, State Fair*) are the organizers of California's Young American Miss pageant in Santa Rosa. (For both Caroline and Erik, this is a first lead role in the PSS after dancing and singing in more than eight combined PSS productions.) Brenda is the former California Young American Miss who still can't get over her loss at the national competition in Baton Rouge, 18 years ago. Brenda is still proving to herself that she can be a winner now as she creates and organizes the "Very best week of your lives!" for the contestants. Can Brenda pull the show together and impress the organizers of the national pageant even though "she didn't win" so many years ago?

Big Bob is affectionate and supportive of Brenda and devotes himself to the pageant for all the right reasons. It is his true vocation; although, the rest of his year is spent on his glamorous business of Recreational Vehicle sales. "Big Bob's customers are also his friends." He is a good man and a good husband.

Brenda's no-nonsense assistant, Carol (Caitlin Foye - *Nanette's* dancing Irish maid and confidant in *No No Nanette*) and Big Bob cater to all of Brenda's wants and needs during the pageant.

This year, the pageant's contestants are an impressive assemblage of Young American Misses, from all over the state of California, including:

Robin Gibson (Allison Schenkler - stole the show as Margie Frake in *State Fair*, recently in *Mame* and *Urinetown*) is a sweet thing from little Antelope Valley. Although she is a very bright girl, she is very naïve when it comes to pageants and just hasn't let her imagination surpass her stage fright. While in Santa Rosa, she

plans to visit the home of Luther Burbank, the inventor of the nectarine.

Doria Hudson (Freda Bernstein - with major roles in *I Am a Woman* and *The Wiz* both at Schreiber, *Urinetown, Mame, Anything Goes*, and *State Fair*) is a contender who recently moved from Waco, Texas to Yuba City, CA. She really knows her way around a pageant, "It's my hobby, practically." She dreams of one day being Miss Disneyland and loves Coconut/Macadamia cookies.

Sandra-Kay MacAffee (LeAnn Li - *Urinetown, The Wiz*, there was not a dry eye in the house during her emotional performance in *I Am a Woman*) is a well-rounded and particularly articulate contestant from Bakersfield, whose talent routine may give us all whiplash.

Maria Gonzalez (Nicole Lalena, in her first featured role in the PSS after many years in the ensemble) brings diversity to the pageant as a Mexican-American contestant from Salinas. She's got some avocados and a plan. And she isn't afraid to use them!

Shawn Christianson (Katie McCulloh - *Urinetown, I Am a Woman, The Wiz, Anything Goes, State Fair, No No Nanette*) is Maria's roommate. She has lived a sheltered life in La Jolla and is particularly politically incorrect in her thoughts; but, her statements seem to express the sentiment of many of the contestants.

Valerie Sherman (Heather Foye - Ann Frank in *I Am a Woman, State Fair, No No Nanette, Urinetown*) from Sacramento is Shawn's confidant; although she doesn't necessarily buy into Shawn's sentiments.

Cookie Wilson (Molly Fried - *State Fair, No No Nanette, Urinetown, I Am a Woman*), is a rousing gospel singer, "Satan, don't you dare come near," from Carson.

Nine other local pageant winners competing this year include: Kimberly Lyons

(Zoe Blicksilver), Patty-Lynn Bird (Meghan Doyle), Heidi Anderson (Shannon Ferguson), Connie-Sue Whipple (Chelsea Morano), Trudi Lee (Cory Morano), Dana Simpson (Tara Schneider), Kate Gardner (Micah Seigel), Debralee Davis (Lillian Weingart) and Gina Minelli (Taylor Wilsey).

Other characters involved with the pageant include:

Dale Wilson-Shears (Matthew Gray - Abel Frake in *State Fair*) is the gentlemanly director of the Young America Miss Foundation and heads the national pageant in Baton Rouge, LA. He knows that the foundation is looking for a girl who exudes "The joy of bringing joy to those around her"

Tommy French (Andrew Cuthill - a dance staple of *No No Nanette, Anything Goes*, and *State Fair*) is a real professional who is flown in to choreograph the pageant. He manages to take nice high school girls and turn them into "Vegas Show Girls." He knows the business and sticks to his guns, whatever the cost.

Ted Farley (David Rosenblatt - a bright new face in the PSS lineup, recently seen as the Soliloquial Policeman in *Urinetown*) is a well-known master of ceremonies, who (completing the stereotype) wants everyone aware that he knows the president (Reagan) and Nancy, too. But, Bert Parks he's not!

Joanne Marshall (Liana Young - *No No Nanette, State Fair, Anything Goes*), the reigning California Young American Miss, and Ted will crown this year's winner... but wait... will there be a winner?

Other side plots involve Little Bob (Tommy Doyle), Brenda and Big Bob's son, who along with his friend Freddie (Kevin Roberts), does his best to be a businessman just like his dad. Tony (Jonny Schechner -

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the mystical snake charmer, peddling dancing girls in *State Fair* and Nanette's taptastic sweetheart in *No No Nanette*), and Father Murphy (Jeremy Geller - Caldwell P. Cladwell, the despicable pottymeister in *Urinetown*) are pageant judges along with (Conor Hughes - doubling as a photographer) who must interview the contestants.

Other credited performers include the multitalented Richard Blue who plays the parts of Daddy and the musical director for the pageant, Nick Gardella, who plays the parts of Ed and Brother, Lisa Fearn who plays the role of Louise, and Jennifer Marno who plays Robin's dear mom.

The ensemble is rounded out by Isabel Barry, Julia Bain, Victoria Bensen, Kevin Greenstein, Tamara Hoffman, Emma Ho-hauser, Arianna Kosloff, Ashley Larsen, Kalia Lay, Tori Lehrer, Sara Lyons, Annabelle May, Ani O'Hanlan, Alison Peltz, Annie Rowland, Annie Rubin, Chloe Stayton, Michael Schweitzer, Laura Werle, and Shari Zimmerman. Every night these performers rehearse and re-rehearse

their songs and steps, an indication of their devotion to the show. And the show wouldn't be the same without them all, because the whole show is so much more than the sum of the parts.

The PSS is under new leadership this year with Suzanne Foye and Ellen McCulloh as co-presidents, since both Martha Zeleniak and Dee Otte stepped down after long and successful runs with the organization. Jason Summers directs/choreographs the show and Gary Eisele directs the music (the singers and the orchestra). This high tempo show, chocked full of dancing and singing is accompanied by a vibrant and lively pit orchestra. The lights for the Weber Stage have been totally revamped by Matt Wolfe, Brian Wedeking and Robin Schroeder, just for this production. It's sure to bring a smile to your face just to see so many of Port Washington's beaming youth "Shine!" against the warm glow of the auditorium.

Shows at Weber Auditorium are on Aug. 2, 3, 4 at 8 p.m. and the Sunday matinee on Aug. 5 begins at 2 p.m.