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THEATER REVIEW



Tibbits Opera House has a rousing production of "Oklahoma!"

Footwork helps make 'Oklahoma!' a beauty

NICOLE L.V. MULLIS
FOR THE ENQUIRER

"Oklahoma!" was the first musical written by dynamic duo Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. It was also the first musical to use choreography as a means to forward the storyline, earning original choreographer Agnes de Mille credit with Rogers and Hammerstein.

Tibbits Summer Professional Theatre enlisted choreographer Kevin Halpin to direct its production of this classic musical. The result is as beautiful as the Oklahoma morning memorialized in the opening number.

"Oklahoma!" features the tangled love lives of settlers in the Oklahoma Territory around the turn of the century. Ranchers and farmers may not like each other, but they sure are attracted to each other. Independent farm girl Laurey fights her desire for charming cowboy Curly by accepting the advances of disturbed farmhand Jud Fry. Meanwhile, flirtatious farmer's daughter Ado Annie can't decide between simple-headed cowpoke Will Parker, who wants marriage, and fast-talking peddler Ali Hakim, who

If you go

» **WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. July 7-9 and July 14-16; 2 p.m. July 13.
» **WHERE:** Tibbits Opera House, 14 S. Hanchett St., Coldwater.
» **COST:** Tickets range from \$10 to \$31.
» **INFO:** 517-278-6029; www.tibbits.org.

wants a fling. Settling down takes on new meaning as innocence mingles with naughtiness, and love bumps against violence in the quest for the altar and statehood.

It is a fun story with dark undertones, told with clever feet and hearty voices. Under choreographer-in-chief Halpin's direction, this cast brings both to the stage.

Taylor Eliason and Catherine Skojec lead the way as Curly and Laurey. Skojec's winsome voice and sassy vulnerability play well on stage. Eliason brings a joy to Curly that has you rooting for him as soon as his melodious voice sounds from the back of the theater. They have a great chemistry, which weaves tension into every tease and kiss. "People Will Say We're in Love" is truly a sigh-able moment.

Drew Purrett makes dim-witted Will Parker the sharpest two-stepper on stage. This man can dance, and when this talented ensemble lines up behind him, he is electric. Joey Gugliemelli and Jacklyn Collins are the show's comedic bedrock as Ali Hakim and Ado Annie. Mitch Voss gives gravity to Jud Fry with his deep voice and anguished face, while Gloria Logan brings a feisty frontier spirit to Laurey's guardian Aunt Eller. It's a great cast.

This production boasts four 2016 Wilde Award nominees, who seem keen for 2017 nominations as well.

Halpin, nominated for choreography, brings his "A" game to this dance-dependent musical. The "Dream Sequence," led by dancers Maureen Duke and Tim Edman as Dream Laurey and Dream Curly, is a mesmerizing mix of ballet, modern and lyrical dance. It crowns a string of eye-catching ensemble numbers, including "Kansas City," "It's a Scandal! It's an Outrage!" and "The Farmer and the Cowman."

Marc W. Vital II, nominated for costume design, didn't chest this large cast so much as a bonnet. The costumes are

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plentiful, colorful and a glory to watch swirl and twirl. Aaron Lichamer, nominated for light design, makes an Oklahoma morning as glorious as he makes Jud's smokehouse ominous.

Cheryl VanDuzen, nominated for music direction, leads a full-bodied orchestra who knows when to whisper a melody and when to raise the roof. The score is an accomplished partner for the cast's voices. The only blip is Eliason's microphone, which occa-

sionally loses its voice.

Set designer Daniel Thobias may not have a current Wilde nomination, but his set deserves praise. The layered backdrops of an Oklahoma cornfield bring depth to the stage. The set pieces are detailed yet simple, setting multiple scenes with relative ease.

This production of "Oklahoma!" will have you singing all the way home and, more likely than not, two-steppin' in your seat.

Please note the parking lot off South Hanchett Street is still under construction. There is alternative parking and open sidewalks. Check the website for more details.

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