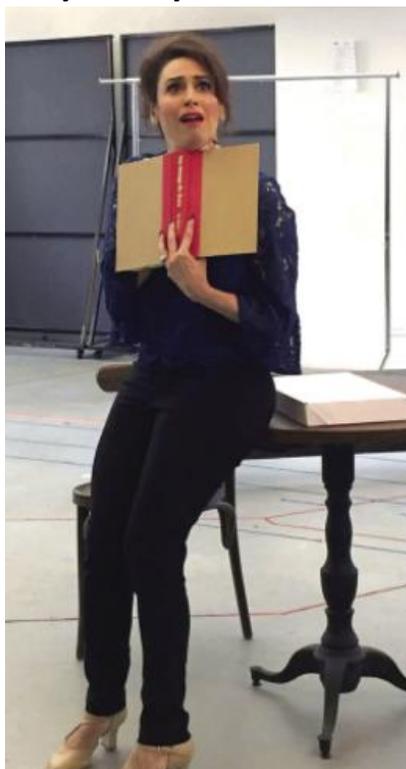


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'Guys and Dolls' and romance at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope



“There is something about her tenacity and strength that is so attractive,” says Leslit Margherita of her character Adelaide

By Debra Wallace

Everyone has time for a classic love story, and they don't come more endearing than “Guys and Dolls,” which is gearing up for a three-week run at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope.

On a recent Thursday in Manhattan, the cast members performed three musical numbers at the Roundabout Theater Rehearsal Studio, a few blocks from 42nd Street.

It was the ninth day in the two-week rehearsal process of one of the iconic musicals, a show with unlikely heroes that was, at the time of Broadway's Golden Age, called a giant valentine to the optimism of post-World War II America.



Nicely Nicely Johnson (Dariys DeHaas, left) performs “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ The Boat” at rehearsal at Roundabout Theater (photo by Alex Rodemich).

At the rehearsal studio, the high-energy cast presented an exciting sneak peek at three of the many memorable musical numbers — “Adelaide’s Lament,” “If I Were A Bell” and “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ The Boat.”

The world of Nicely-Nicely Johnson, Nathan Detroit, Sky Masterson, missionary Sarah Brown and Miss Adelaide takes viewers back in time to floating crap games played in the city’s sewers by commitment-phobic men taking 14 years to tie the knot with their ladies.

The tight-knit cast of the Bucks County Playhouse is bringing to life, from Friday through Aug. 12, the world created by writer Damon Runyon. This is the largest physical production on the playhouse stage since its reopening in 2012.

Director Hunter Foster, who also directed “Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story” and “Clue,” said the show is about “some of the great characters in musical theater history” ... allowing his ensemble “to find their own unique take on the show. Also, there is nothing like having choreography involving gangsters dancing.”

Foster, who was nominated for a Tony Award for acting, calls “Guys and Dolls” an endearing fable about the universal theme of love seen through the hearts and minds of colorful, whimsical and embraceable characters.

“This is the first time we are doing a big Broadway musical, and I am looking forward to the audience reaction,” he said. “I want everyone to have a really good time, and have the opportunity to fall in love with this iconic show all over again.”

The music and lyrics of such songs as “Luck Be A Lady” and “I’ll Know” were written by Frank Loesser, with a book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows. The show is based on two of Runyon’s short stories — “The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown” and “Blood Pressure” — and borrows characters and plot from his story “Pick the Winner.” The Broadway success was followed by a 1955 movie musical starring Frank Sinatra as Nathan and Marlon Brando as Sky.

Darius de Haas of Lambertville, who belted out “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ The Boat” as Nicely-Nicely Johnson, said his parents were both performers and, much to their “consternation,” he was smitten early with the artistic lifestyle while watching his mother’s gigs. “It really felt like I had no other choice.” His advice to up-and-coming performers is to give it everything you’ve got. “If you eventually discover that the arts are not your passion, that’s OK, because the arts are a very important aspect of our lives. So even if you don’t end up being a singer, a dancer, an actor or a musician, the exposure to the arts will benefit you, as well as the life lessons of studying that never stops and working hard every single day.” De Haas, who has performed in the playhouse’s “Ain’t Misbehavin’” and Broadway’s “Shuffle Along,” said that he appreciates that “Guys and Dolls” “is a slice of history. It is a delightful show, with embraceable characters, and whether you enjoy Lady Gaga or other musical performers, it is important to hear this classic music.”

Clarke Thorell, (Broadway’s “Hairspray” and “The Front Page,”) said portraying high-roller Sky Masterson has been a truly memorable experience.

“We have this incredible source material to draw from, and a really safe and nurturing environment in which we are encouraged to make suggestions,” Thorell said. “We are looking forward to the audiences seeing what we have created.”

He said the show has endured the test of time because of Runyon’s witty dialogue and the classic American music. “When you add the fact that we are actors who are enjoying working with one another, this positively impacts the show. This is a chance to come out to the beautiful Bucks County Playhouse, enjoy a drink and have a memorable evening.”

Thorell sees Sky as a complicated guy. “He seems so polished and sure of himself and his business dealings, but underneath, he is resisting everything he grew up with. He’s completely cracked open by Sarah Brown; someone who seems an unlikely match, and he never saw it coming. Yet, he is changed for the better because of it.”

Elena Shaddow (Broadway’s “The Bridges of Madison County” in 2014), loves many aspects of the show and her character, Sarah Brown. “The music is overwhelmingly beautiful, and I love the unpretentious storytelling that it provides — unfussy, fun, straightforward storytelling about love and mischief.” The actress finds that Brown is a much stronger woman than she initially realized. “Sarah has a real fiery streak in her belly,” Shaddow explained. “Usually, Sarah is thought of as this sort of meek girl, but in reality, she has a deep conviction inside of her that she really clings to, as well as being a really strong woman, and in the end, she gets what she wants.”

The other couple in the throes of courtship are Miss Adelaide and Nathan Detroit. Steve Rosen, who portrays Detroit, has performed in “Guys and Dolls” in the national tour and on Broadway.

“I love that most of the principal actors in this production are longtime friends, who hadn’t performed together before,” Rosen said.

Nathan has severe commitment issues. "Nathan is with a woman who is patient to the point of making herself sick about it," said Rosen. "It takes him really screwing up to figure out just how important she is in his life."

The love story is what Lesli Margherita ("Matilda" and "Zorro") is particularly drawn to as she takes the role of Miss Adelaide. "What I appreciate about Adelaide is that she knows what she wants, and it took 14 years, but she is getting it," the actress said.

"There is something about her tenacity and strength that is so attractive. I really love that about her. If this was 'the guy for me,' then sure, I would wait that long for him," Margherita said. "This is such a deep love, and they are so connected, that the story has to have a happy ending."