



TIMES OF TRENTON ENTERTAINMENT

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Theater: Guys and Dolls comes to Bucks County Playhouse



Steve Rosen (Nathan Detroit) and Clarke Thorell (Sky Masterson) in "Guys and Dolls" (Joan Marcus)

By Ted Otten

There's no sign in New York City to let you know you're in Runyonland, but that classic musical "Guys and Dolls," now onstage at New Hope's Bucks County Playhouse through August 12, will take you there for three adventures, two romantic and one illegal.

The illegal one is "the longest established permanent floating crap game in New York," and it's the handiwork of Nathan Detroit (played by Steve Rosen), Nicely-Nicely Johnson (Darius de Haas) and Benny Southstreet (Blakely Slaybaugh). The reason it floats is that it's avoiding police detection, especially the eagle eye of Sgt. Flannigan (Victor Hernandez), and the perpetrators are having trouble finding a safe locale. The game is especially important because gamblers like Big Julie (Brendan Averett) and Sky Masterson (Clarke Thorell) are in town, but rent will be a thousand dollars.

Nathan's love story is an old one. He's been engaged for too long a time to Miss Adelaide (Lesli Margherita), star of a nite spot called the Hot Box. She writes glowing letters to her mother about their wedded bliss and numerous offspring, but her fantasy doesn't match her reality. One of Nathan's many broken promises includes giving up the game, and when Adelaide finds out he hasn't, there are fireworks.

Sky bets Nathan a grand that he can score a date with the city's most unapproachable woman, Sarah Brown (Elena Shaddow). She's a "mission doll" who works this dubious midtown neighborhood with her

Uncle Arvide (Lenny Wolpe) saving souls. When Sky wins his bet with Sarah over a scriptural quote, they are off on a dinner date to Havana, the location of his favorite restaurant. Now, Nathan's in trouble on two fronts: Adelaide is putting both feet down, and he owes Sky a grand. He also needs that other grand to host the game, and his reputation's on the line.

This 1950 show, which ran for 1200 performances its first time around and has been revived five times on Broadway since then, began with a short story and characters created by Damon Runyon, and has a book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows and a score by Frank Loesser, an Oscar-winning Hollywood composer who had moved to Broadway in 1948 with a hit called "Where's Charley?" When Hollywood filmed the screen version of "Guys and Dolls" in 1955 with that notorious non-singer Marlon Brando as Sky, Loesser wrote three new songs, "Pet Me Poppa" for Vivian Blaine as Adelaide, "Adelaide" for Frank Sinatra as Nathan, and "A Woman in Love" for several characters including Brando and Jean Simmons as Sarah, but all failed to win Loesser a second best song Oscar to match his 1949 win for "Baby, It's Cold Outside."

Three of the show's four leads have great songs like "Luck Be a Lady" and "I've Never Been in Love Before" to sing, but Nathan, written originally for the non-singing Sam Levene, is now considered more of a character role than a musical one. Steve Rosen, who has appeared in Broadway musicals like "Spamalot" and the 2009 revival of "Guys and Dolls" as well as his own co-authored off-Broadway shows "The Other Josh Cohen" and "Don't Quit Your Day Job," doesn't mind a bit. "I love Nathan as a person," said Rosen, "and this is my third go-around with this show. I've played Benny Southstreet, and I've played Nathan, but there are different ways to play every character. You can play Nathan as a grumpy, cantankerous man as Sam Levene did, but I see him as a good man, really in love with Adelaide.

"Nathan is in love with one of the greatest musical characters ever written, and he's one of the great character roles. I love to sing, but not everybody can. And how can Nathan or anybody not love Adelaide? It's a classic example of two people who really love each, but one of them has commitment phobia, but the other one holds on out of love. What can be better than their duet, "Sue Me"? Many people can overlook flaws in their partners because love is so strong, and that's what Adelaide does, but even the most patient person has a breaking point.

"Nathan looks up to Sky not only because he's the highest better of all with incredible luck and because Sky is so smooth and elegant," said Rosen, "but Sky's also a mark, a means to an end. Nathan thinks his bet with Sky is a sure thing. When he loses and sees that he now has to come up with two thousand dollars, he's really in a panic."

Lesli Margherita who plays Nathan's love interest is a performer who's been on Broadway in "Matilda: The Musical" and "Dames at Sea" and in London's West End where she won an Olivier Award for "Zorro the Musical," a show written by the Gipsy Kings and recorded by First Night Records for which she'd done workshops, and she was the only American from those productions taken to London. She calls Adelaide a dream-come-true role, and it's also her BCP debut.

"I absolutely love her! She's so honest," said Margherita, "and she makes no apologies or concessions for who she is. She's always trying to better herself. And audiences have just loved her, and I think that's because they can see part of themselves in her. She's always reading, and what she finds in one book gives her a great song, 'Adelaide's Lament' that starts out, 'It says here in this book....' She has that and her nightclub songs 'Take Back Your Mink' and 'A Bushel and a Peck,' as well as that duet with

Nathan where she finally reaches her breaking point. If you don't think that what she says is an exaggeration, and I don't, she's been waiting around for him for fourteen years! She just can't put up with more from him, and that really shakes Nathan up.

"It's at that point that she meets Sarah," said Margherita, "and they have their duet, 'Marry the Man Today,' where they both decide to take their guys as they are and then fix them up later. And I think they both can."

IF YOU GO

"Guys and Dolls"

Where: Bucks County Playhouse, 70 South Main Street, New Hope, PA

When: through August 12; Tuesday through Thursday at 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. with matinees at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

How much: Tickets are \$40 to \$75; group rates for 10 or more

Contact: (215) 862 - 2121 or at buckscountyplayhouse.org.