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Bucks County's 'Guys and Dolls': True Broadway action on the banks of the Delaware

I know, I know, it's summer, and that means Guys and Dolls is everywhere, at home, at the beach, at regional theaters throughout the land, at summer camps, under every stone ... and come the school year, at a thousand more schools.

Forget all that. Go see the fabulous, Broadway-level Guys and Dolls now at the Bucks County Playhouse; you have until Aug. 12. It's fresh, it's funny, great singing and dancing, a starry cast of uncommon chops, and the next morning your head will be full of tunes and your chest full of chuckles.

From the opening ensemble dance, the audience was sold. That entire sequence, with Nicole V. Moody's costumes and Anna Louizos' shadowy set, is a gusty evocation of 1950 Manhattan (and Havana). Props to director Hunter Foster and choreographer Jeremy Dumont. Foster is magic with pacing and comic business, lightning-quick establishment of character and plot-threads. We knew these folks even before the first line. And Dumont gives this entire production a style of movement, limber, poised, with dancierlike flow, even folks meant (like Nathan Detroit, played with rumbled apology by Steve Rosen) to be schlumpy or awkward.

Plenty of ringers in this cast. You may recognize Rosen; Brendan Averett as a towering Big Jule; Ruth Gottschall as General Cartwright; soprano Elena Shaddow, big-eyed and vulnerable as Sarah Brown; square-jawed tenor Clarke Thorell as Sky Masterson; and especially well-known TV guy Lenny Wolpe, whose "More I Cannot Wish You" brought melted-hearted applause. The ensemble are graceful and expressive dancers: Alyssa Gardner and Adam Vanek made an especially compelling dance couple. Despite signs of tiredness this late in the run, all voices were crazy-good. And the songs: "The Oldest Established," "Guys and Dolls," "Luck Be a Lady," and "Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat" – sing 'em. Rosen's Detroit is funny and unkempt and full of shrugs ("I have been running this crap game ever since I was a juvenile delinquent"), with dashes of Jon Lovitz and Nathan Lane. Shaddow's voice was star-high, and Thorell's was by turns acid and soft; my favorite single number was his splendid job on the modernist passage titled "My Time of Day."

But: The whole shebang gets filched, I mean swiped, I mean stole, by thousand-watt Lesli Margherita as Adelaide. Margherita is a singular comic master, hamming it up as a dive dancer who hams it up. If you want a feminist Guys and Dolls, scram. Adelaide, longing so hard for marriage she comes down with the psychosomatic flu ... well, it's 1950. Judy Holliday, Lucille Ball, Mae West, and Margherita – perfect together. I creased at her sweetly porny "Bushel and a Peck," and her first and second "Lament." And her duet with Shaddow for "Marry the Man Today" was resigned but sneaky, confirming much of the worst the men think about women. When Margherita stepped forward for her bow, the standing O made the walls shake.

“Everybody’s looking for action,” as Nathan Detroit tells us. There’s plenty in Guys and Dolls. Bucks County Playhouse brings true Broadway achievement to the banks of the Delaware.

Guys and Dolls. Through Aug. 12 at Bucks County Playhouse, 70 S. Main Street, New Hope. Tickets: \$40-\$75. Information: 215-862-2121, buckscountyplyhouse.org.