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# BETHLEHEM PRESS

July 5, 2018

## Theater Review: '42nd Street' spectacular at Bucks Playhouse



By Paul Willistein

In "42nd Street," Peggy Sawyer is the best little tapper from Allentown, Pa.

"42nd Street," the musical, through Aug. 4, Bucks County Playhouse, New Hope, has the best tap-dancing this side of Broadway.

Tessa Grady, who plays Peggy Sawyer with a combination of innocent insecurity and can-do bravado, has to be one of the fastest tap-dancers ever. Her feet are a blur as she taps her way across the stage, in turns, spins, in place, and even backwards.

Grady is a triple-threat (sings, dances, acts), as is the 17-member Actors Equity and six Acting Apprentice cast in the phenomenal Bucks' "42nd Street" production directed by Bucks County Playhouse Artistic Associate Hunter Foster.

With at least one dozen of the cast members on stage tapping in unison, with precision on-point poise, in stunning choreography by Jeremy Dumont, the effect is jaw-dropping amazing. If you're a fan of tap, of Broadway musicals, or of "42nd Street," don't miss the Bucks' production.

The original 1980 Broadway stage musical, with a book by Michael Stewart and Mark Bramble, lyrics by Al Dubin and Johnny Mercer, and music by Harry Warren, received the Tony Award for Best Musical. The 2001 Broadway revival received a Tony for Best Revival.

The musical is based on a novel by Bradford Ropes and the 1933 Hollywood film. The musical includes songs from other films for which Dubin and Warren wrote songs, including "Gold Diggers of 1933," "Roman Scandals," "Dames," "Gold Diggers of 1935," "Go Into Your Dance," "Gold Diggers of 1937," "The Singing Marine" and the song, "There's a Sunny Side to Every Situation," by Warren and Johnny Mercer for "Hard to Get."

Peggy Sawyer's nickname in the show is "Allentown," and the city's name provides some of the show's best punchlines and laughs. Sawyer is fresh off the train from Allentown to audition for Great White Way director Julian Marsh's musical during the Great Depression.

Standout numbers, in the June 30 opening night performance at Bucks Playhouse seen for this review, include:

"Shadow Waltz," with Ruth Gottschall (Maggie Jones), a wonderful belter, and Linda Balgord (Dorothy Brock), who plays and sings the role of the grande dame exquisitely.

"Go Into Your Dance," with Gottschall (Maggie), Monette McKay (Annie), Grady (Peggy), Daisy Wright (Phyllis), Brianna Latrash (Lorraine) and Matt Bauman (Andy Lee) singing and dancing up a storm.

"Getting Out Of Town," with the Company tapping loud and proud.

"Dames," with Blakely Slaybaugh (Billy Lawlor) pulling out all the stops in his song and dance tap routine with the Company.

"We're In The Money," with McKay, Grady, Latrash, Slaybaugh and Ensemble bringing this favorite to life.

"Lullaby Of Broadway," with Matt Walton (Julian Marsh) belting it out with the Company.

"Shuffle Off To Buffalo," with Kilty Reidy (Bert Barry), Gottschall, McKay, and the Female Ensemble, in a charming throwback in set design, vocals and dance.

"42nd Street," with Grady, Slaybaugh and Company in a spectacular build to the show's conclusion.

Production values are top-notch, including the Scenic Design by Anna Louizos, which utilizes several backdrops, set pieces and a silhouette sequence to good effect, plus fully-realized penthouse room and train station interiors. The Lighting Design by Kirk Bookman is dramatic without drawing too much attention.

The Costume Design by Nicole V. Moody brings out tuxedos, top hats and tails for the men and gowns of coordinated pastels for the women. There are impressively-tailored suits for the males and cute rehearsal outfits for the females. Wig and Hair Design is by J. Jared Janas. The Director of Production is Matthew Given.

Music Director William Shuler, working with Sound Design by Bart Fasbender, and six-piece band of keyboards, reeds, trumpet, trombone, bass and drums, creates a solid, bright music accompaniment that doesn't overwhelm the vocalists. The actor's choral singing is especially powerful and impressive.

Bucks County Playhouse's "42nd Street" brings Broadway to New Hope's Main Street. Don't miss this quintessential backstage musical at the quintessential summer-theater destination.

Tickets: Bucks County Playhouse box office, 70 S. Main St., New Hope; [buckscountyplayhouse.org](http://buckscountyplayhouse.org); 215-862-2121