

TMP lets seniors play at ‘Working’

by Lynn Geyer

There are as many amateur theatre groups in the Puget Sound area as there are talented producers. Most of them mount one or possibly two shows a season; many are short lived – some become mainstays in our communities.

There are three full-time community theatres in the Tacoma area that turn out quality entertainment from September to July; some also do summer productions.

They are The Lakewood Playhouse, Tacoma Little Theatre and Tacoma Musical Playhouse.

Each house serves great fare for the theatre-going public. Each has the responsibility of giving our budding thespians a taste of theatrical experiences with hands-on classes and full junior productions through their excellent Youth Theatre programs.

However, TMP goes an extra step and rekindles the footlights in the eyes of our senior population – 50 and older – with one more or yet-to-try opportunity to trod the boards through the auspices of The Young at Heart Players.

This group of not yet over-the-hill singers/dancers/actors are offered one more – or their first – opportunity to spread their wings and hear the audience’s reaction to their efforts once a year when TMP relinquishes the stage to the talented not-quite-prime-players to appear in a major musical production.

“Working,” the musical about real people dealing with their jobs and lives, is this year’s offering.

“Working” is adapted for the stage by Stephen Schwartz and Nina Faso from a book by Studs Terkel. The very (pardon the pun) workable set is designed by Bruce Haas, with lighting by Caitlin Cowan, who is also Stage Manager.

Angelica Barksdale does the choreographer, giving seemingly easy steps to follow, yet, when examined, some movements are quiet intricate

Musical Director Debbie Hushagen also handles piano in The Band, which has been placed down stage right, in full view of the audience; Brian Keiper on guitar, Jim Hushagen strums bass and percussionist Iris McBride comprise the rest of the excellent music makers.

Julie Halpin ably directs the cast, which is composed of novice performers mixed with tried and true, well known local talent. Halpin has given each of the 16 cast members their chance to shine; the cast doesn’t disappoint her – some shine more brightly than others but none is disappointing.

Rosemary Pinneo is receptionist Sharon Atkins who has a story to tell about all the hard workers in our society and does so nicely.

Julie Cole is project manager Amanda McKenny and prostitute Roberta Victor. Cole is stunning in red as the hooker who learns at an early age she can sit back and make a lot of money doing “nothing.”

Karen Onstad is tech support worker Raj Chadha with a good voice singing a good story.

Larry Chandler plays long haul driver Frank Decker and fireman Tom Patrick. Chandler does an admirable job with both parts.

Doug Cowan is ironworker Mike Dillard and hedge fund manager Rex Winship. Cowan gets to the heart of his job and tells the audience all.

Cheryl Kliese makes her TMP debut as Terry Mason, the flight attendant, who always had a smile in grade school, which continues on in adulthood with her chosen vocation.

Lisa Ballerino is elder care worker Utkarsh Trajillo. Ballerino has a very nice moment with Carol Rawlings when, as Theresa Liu, they sing "A Very Good Day;" Rawlings also plays community organizer Alice Epstein.

Doug Ernst has three roles: Conrad Swibel from UPS, stone mason Anthony Coelho and Father. Ernst's heartfelt rendition of "Fathers and Sons" brings a tear to the brink of the audiences' eye.

Aya Hashiguchi Clark is Maggie Holmes. Hashiguchi Clark is an accomplished actor who also sings quite well, which is obvious when she leads the other women in "Cleanin' Women;" she is well known to local audiences.

Leslie Watts is Rose Hoffman, a retired school teacher who longs for the good-old-days when corporal punishment was in vogue and children learned more than how to text on their cell phones. Watts easily gets her idea across to the audience in "Nobody Tells Me How" with a lilt in her voice and a gleam in her eye. This song segues into the airplane scene.

Curtis Beech is Joe Zutty, who acts as the pilot of the amazing airplane Halpin has created. Beech has a nice moment when he relates his retirement woes. He is a competent actor who can handle comedic or straight roles with aplomb.

Nan Gillis is fundraiser Candy Cottingham. Gillis is charmingly devious in her genteel conniving way of procuring the "donations" she seeks for her charities.

Susan Hendricks is Kate Rushton. Hendricks has one of the better singing voices in the show. The distaff half of the audience commiserates with Hendricks when she plaintively sings "Just a Housewife."

Leigh Duncan makes her TMP debut; however, Duncan has played around the Puget Sound area for many years leaving audiences with happy memories of her good work. The diminutive actor outdoes herself with the "Millwork" number – shades of "Metropolis!"

Kate Russell is outstanding as Delores Dante, the waitress. Russell prances about the stage, tray in hand, serving up a tremendous rendition of "It's an Art," one of the best and most appreciated songs in the show.

"Working" has an extremely short run playing only two more performances at Tacoma Musical Playhouse at 7116 Sixth Avenue, just east of Jackson. There is a Saturday and Sunday matinee at 2 p.m. June 19 and 20.

For reservations or more information, call the box office at (253) 565-6867 or go online to www.tmp.org.

Forego another dull day of golf; drive right by the US Open links at Chambers Bay and work your way north to 6th Avenue to see real workers working hard for your enjoyment. After all, golf is just another ball bouncing into a cup – "Working" is live theatre.