

Anything Goes on the SS America



“Bon voyage, bon voyage,” sing the excited travelers preparing to embark on a transatlantic journey aboard the SS America. This is just one of many terrific ensemble numbers in Ocean State Theatre Company’s production of Cole Porter’s Tony Award-Winning Musical *Anything Goes*. And, for those who ventured out to the opening night performance, it certainly was a “good trip.”

The musical tells the familiar boy meets girl story, but things quickly become complicated when the assortment of unusual shipmates begin to mingle, amongst them: a gangster and his “moll,” a wealthy debutante, her fiancé and her mother, a nightclub singing evangelist, a wealthy businessman and his stowaway assistant, sexy showgirls and plenty of sailors.

Director Amiee Turner keeps the pace quick and the laughs come early and often. With a paper-thin plot and sometimes sophomoric humor, this zany musical may not be for those who prefer their theater to be a bit headier and more topical, but if you’re looking for some wonderful individual performances and some refreshingly crisp choreography, then this show is for you.

Many of the show’s early laughs belong to Jason Loete. He is a hoot as the overzealous “Yale man” Elisha Whitney. With a martini in one hand and his stuffed Yale bulldog in the other, his idea of courtship features gems like: “I think of you and time stands still. Your face could stop a clock.”

Nate Suggs also has many fine moments portraying the love struck Billy Crocker with an infectious charm and enthusiasm. He possesses a pleasant singing voice and proves to be a pretty good hooper with an effortless way of moving. Both were on full display during a spirited duet with Jessica Wagner (Reno Sweeney) in “You’re the Top.”

But Wagner is the star of this show displaying a tremendous singing voice while belting out many of the musical’s iconic numbers: “I Get a Kick Out of You,” “Blow, Gabriel, Blow,” and a most impressive “Anything Goes” just before intermission. She has an easy and silky way about her, the chemistry between Reno and Billy appears far more genuine than that of Billy and his actual love interest the debutante Hope Harcourt.

While Jade Genga certainly looks the part of the pampered Harcourt, her voice, though pretty, is underwhelming and her interactions with Billy look stiff and awkward.

The musical is also filled with many of the usual minor characters that contribute mightily. Dennis Setteducati makes for a fabulously bumbling Moonface Martin, a petty criminal with an inferiority complex about his ranking as “public enemy #13.” His sidekick Erma continually chides him at one point telling him that he has been passed by tooth decay on the public enemies list.

Kate Howe, as Moonface’s “moll,” shows well throughout, but really delivers the goods during a sultry “Buddie, Beware.”

Andrew Boza draws his share of laughs as Lord Evelyn Oakleigh, always the unwitting butt of the joke thanks to some nicely timed self-effacing humor. He is especially charming during “The Gypsy in Me.” The orchestra also sounds particularly good here playing with a bit of an Egyptian flair. Directed by Esther Zabinski, they are impressive all evening, often sounding bigger than just six instruments.

The set designers, under Bert Scott, once again do their part creating an authentic looking ship deck with a platform that rolls in and out of the ship’s interior. It is here where much of the action occurs, making for some remarkably seamless scene changes.

Though this musical is extremely dated, Turner’s dizzying pace, some fantastic individual performances and some sharp, original dance numbers, will certainly keep you engaged. Choreographer Gerrienne Genga also deserves some praise for keeping the choreography fresh and entertaining, particularly during a breathless “Anything Goes.”

OSTC’s presentation of “Anything Goes” runs through May 22 at the company’s Jefferson Boulevard theatre. For tickets or more information, visit oceanstatetheatre.org.