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The Andrews Brothers

"Andrews Brothers:" A Songsation

by Jerry Layton - Around Town Magazine - April 8, 2009

The **Andrews Sisters** were the voice of the late 1930's and World War II. Many of the boys who marched away to fight in Europe and the Pacific did so with the songs of Patty, Maxene and Laverne in their ears.

Now they and their music are happily resurrected in the Rising Action Theatre's rousing production of "The Andrews Brothers."

"Brothers" is a fun show, beautifully done. It is the kind of show that makes you want to sing and dance along with it, and this time, if you are anywhere over 50, you know the lyrics and the arrangements. Songs like **Mairzy Doats**, **Hold Tight** and **Beer Barrel Polka** come easily to the tongue.

The deliberately paper-thin plot is simple enough not to interfere with the flow of the music, which is the important thing. At a remote base in the Pacific, they are expecting a guest appearance by the Andrews gals. Three stagehand brothers, Patrick, Max and Lawrence, are rehearsing with the Andrews' backup singer, pinup Peggy Jones.

The boys are three rejected showbiz wannabes, who will do anything to get onstage. Max and Lawrence are gung-ho about performing, but neurotic Patrick is rendered almost speechless by fear and the proximity of the cute and sexy Peggy.

News comes that the show has been canceled because Laverne has chicken pox and the girls are quarantined. This creates a good deal of consternation and disappointment, until Peggy, in a sharp bit of razzle-dazzle, converts the Andrews Brothers into the Andrews Sisters, at the end Act I.

With the beginning of Act 2, the show really begins to perk. Once you get past the gimmicky sex change and the expected gags about three klutzy men in high heels, the music is able to take over. You can settle back and let the nostalgia wrap itself around you.

Rising Action has chosen its cast well. They are four solid actors and excellent singers. It is a pleasant novelty to see 40+ men playing the parts that are usually reserved, in most revues, for twentyish girls and boys.

Joel S. Johnson (Lawrence) is the quiet, bespectacled, restrained member of the family. He knows the songs, but he does not know the words. Much fun is made of his small blue cheat cards. He has an easy to listen to everyman tenor and adds a welcome texture to their many songs.

David Meulemans (Max), a veteran of many local productions is the Moe to his personal group of stooges. He is the boss, commander and whipsnapper. **His is a strong, controlled, pleasant baritone voice that deepens the excellent harmonics.**

But the one to watch is Fermin Rojas (Patrick). This is the first time I have ever seen him, and it is a pleasure to make his acquaintance. He is a big man, yet he moves with unexpected grace through his several dance numbers. In the moments of being tongue-tied, he reminds one of Lenny in "Of Mice and Men." **However, when he starts to sing, his is a mellow bass-baritone that fleshes out the beautiful sound of the trio.**

The find of the evening is **Alisha Todd (Peggy).** She is petite, pert and sassy. She has pizzazz a luminous personality and a bright, sparkling voice. She is strong enough to get herself three solos in the course of the evening.

She pairs well with Rojas in a giant/munchkin romantic relationship, and they dance delightfully to "On a Slow Boat to China" and a Hawaiian Medley.

Director/Choreographer Dave Campbell has shown a wealth of background and a solid understanding of musical and dance techniques.

He has chosen to make his production as pleasing to the ears as possible. Throughout he has provided fetching three and four part harmonies for every number. **His choreography is fresh, imaginative and ultra-creative.** Dealing as he does with obvious non-dancers, the results are impressive and rewarding. His formations and fill steps are right on the money.

Also the scenery by Tim Webb shows what a little ingenuity can do with the **commonest of objects.** Using various size shipping crates, he converts them into a multi-configuration stage and unexpected stage curtains.

With this production, Rising Action has hit its stride, with a show that is 100% for any audience. Seniors will love it, and it will be an excellent means to introduce younger generations to an entirely different kind of music.

Artistic Director David Goldyn is to be complimented for his choice.

