

Holy Rollers: "Guys & Dolls," at the Clinton Showboat through August 19

Written by Mike Schulz

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The Clinton Area Showboat Theatre's production of *Guys & Dolls* is wonderfully entertaining and loaded with personality, but in the role of Miss Adelaide - the put upon showgirl with the psychosomatic head cold - Kay Ann Allmand is so sensationally enjoyable that her portrayal practically defies description.

Permit me to give it a shot anyway.

Adelaide, with her squeaky, lightly nasal Noo Yawk accent, arrives about twenty minutes into *Guys & Dolls*

, and Allmand's dizzily empty-headed readings immediately put the audience in her corner. But not long after, she's given her first solo in Frank Loesser's musical-comedy classic, at it's then that you realize just how special this performance will be.

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In a show that doesn't feature a single lackluster number, "Adelaide's Lament" - wherein she bemoans her 14-year engagement to gambler Nathan Detroit - might be its best, and Allmand's hysterically dry resignation, describing her "chronic organic syndrome" and such, is a stitch. Yet the actress' phrasing is so delicate, and her emotional connection to the lyrics so deeply felt, that Allmand transcends an already transcendent number; her wit makes you cry with laughter, and her plaintive sweetness nearly makes you cry, *period*. The applause she received at Thursday's opening-night production was thunderous, and from that moment on, Allmand was never around quite as often as you wished she'd be.

Thankfully, the show is so chock-full of ingratiating figures and divine musical numbers that you're rarely given *opportunities* to miss her. Under the direction of the Showboat's artistic director, Craig A. Miller, this *Guys & Dolls* is a terrifically upbeat, thoroughly winning endeavor, and all the more noteworthy for overcoming a truly shaky opening.

Scenic artist Joshua Jeffrey has designed some spectacular set pieces; the urban exteriors, in particular, are beautifully detailed, and their height and breadth especially impressive given the Showboat's limited stage space. Is it possible, though, that the set is hindering the actors' ability to hear the backstage orchestra? Several early numbers found the performers frequently rushing ahead of the music, and once those on-stage seemed to *realize* that, their volume (and exuberance) noticeably dipped; I felt the actors hesitant about selling the songs with too much vigor. And while Stephen Blaschke's choreography (some of it extrapolated from the show's 1992 Broadway revival) has a high-energy infectiousness, the lack of movement in the opening "Fugue for Tinhorns" and "Follow the Fold" indicated a lack of expected, and *necessary* , pep.

However, those fears soon proved unfounded - this cast could likely sit on stools for *Guys & Dolls Unplugged* and leave the crowd thoroughly satisfied.

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