

Pros at Cons: "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels," at the Prospect Park Auditorium through July 15

Written by Thom White
Monday, 09 July 2012 06:00



There's nothing rotten about Quad City Music Guild's current production of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*; Thursday's preview performance was delightfully wicked from beginning to end. There is, however, plenty that's dirty in this musical stage adaptation of the 1988 film, which starred Michael Caine and Steve Martin. The raunchy humor is sharp and smart, including the plethora of usually groan-worthy double entendres, and it's all delivered remarkably well by director Greg Bouljon's cast.

With a book by Jeffrey Lane and music and lyrics by David Yazbek, the stage version follows the same premise as the film, with a wealthy con man working the patrons of a hotel and casino near the French Riviera, and trying to squash the competition when another swindler attempts to move in on his territory. The two subsequently make a bet that whichever one of them successfully cons a selected victim gets to stay, while the loser will be relegated to hustling in a few specific, undesirable countries. And, in this production, Sherrard.

As the con man Lawrence, J. Adam Lounsberry offers the best performance I've yet seen from him. While I could never quite place his indeterminate accent (a hint of French with a dash of English ... sort of ...), Lounsberry comes off as a distinguished, classy gentleman who happens to make a very good living from cheating women out of their money, mostly by claiming to be a prince who lost his fortune. Despite playing a con artist, there's no hint of affectation in Lounsberry's acting, as he creates what could be his most fluid, most well-defined characterization to date.



At first, I wasn't as sure about Ben Holmes' portrayal of Freddy, the small-potatoes swindler whom Lawrence begrudgingly takes under his wing and places the potentially career-ending bet. However, once Holmes hits his first solo song, "Great Big Stuff" (during which Freddy talks of all of the lavish things he'd buy if he were as successful as Lawrence), I was wowed. From that point on, Holmes masterfully navigates the role, tossing out one hilariously filthy line after another, and landing a home run with each joke. He particularly shines when his Freddy pretends to be Lawrence's repulsive brother, Ruprecht, to help Lawrence escape a shotgun – or rather, two-pistol – wedding to a wealthy Oklahoma cowgirl (played with remarkably high energy by Sara Nicole Wegener, who would steal the show if there weren't so many other talented cast

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members). Holmes continues to command the stage, and the audience's attention, as his Freddy works to win the bet by pretending to be a man paralyzed from the waist down yet suffering from "dance fever" – an emotionally painful combination.

Playing Christine, the subject of the con men's contest, Sheri Olson enters the raucous fray like a ray of sunshine; her demeanor is so light and happy that she's a breath of clean, fresh air in the midst of the enjoyably dirty proceedings. Olson's Christine is so likable that, if Lounsberry's and Holmes' dirty dealings weren't so much fun to watch, you'd hate them for trying to take her for all she's worth.



Paul Workman is also noteworthy, offering a relatively subtle turn as Lawrence's assistant Andre. Employing a fine French accent, Workman plays the part with sincerity, letting his jokes find their way to the audience's ears rather than *pushing* them there. Jamie Bauschka amuses as Muriel, a victim of Lawrence's princely scam, matching Workman's humor and sincerity while the pair fall in love/lust. And though cast in a small role that isn't even given a name beyond "Hotel Manager," Tom Vaccaro, impressively, never drops character while in the background. He's fascinating to watch as a busy manager at a hotel desk – answering the phone, greeting guests, and beckoning staff members.

Assuming he was also the show's scenic designer (as one isn't listed in the program), Bouljon's sets are stylishly grand, with muted oranges and blues reminiscent of stereotypically "Miami" colors. And while choreographer Carol Jamison's dance moves tend to be literal, physicalized translations of song lyrics, they're quite effective and often entertaining, particularly in the full ensemble numbers "Great Big Stuff" and "Oklahoma." I could argue that Yazbek's songs are not ones you'd hum on the way home, and that most of the characters could be at least a wee-bit better-defined, but there's nothing really bad about Quad City Music Guild's production of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*

. The performance is a fantastically fun celebration of con artistry worth relishing.

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels runs at the Prospect Park Auditorium (1584 34th Avenue, Moline) through July 15, and information and tickets are available by calling (309)762-6610 or visiting

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