

# You'll get a kick out of 'Anything Goes'

By CINDY NICKERSON  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**COTUIT** – There it stands in all its glory as the audience wanders in: the stage transformed into the cross-section of a 1920s ocean liner. Designed by Nicholas Dorr, this handsome set looks solid and seaworthy – as it proved to be on its maiden voyage Thursday night.

If, as they say, you have only one chance to make a good first impression: Mission accomplished.

But everything that follows in Cotuit Center for the Arts' production of "Anything Goes" is just as shipshape. Michele Colley's tight direction exploits the potential for every ounce of fun in this crowd-pleaser, pulling you in with contagious high spirits as the cast smoothly navigates the stairways between decks along with the intricacies of the madcap plot.

Billy Crocker (Evan Eckstrom) stows away on the S.S. American when he learns his elusive love, sweet young heiress Hope Harcourt (Kiley Donovan), is on board. Unfortunately for them both, she is already engaged to the stuffy Lord Evelyn Oakleigh (Steve Ross). "I know he's English," Billy says, "because he said 'quite' instead of 'yes,' like any normal person." Reno Sweeney (Eileen Fendler), an evangelist turned nightclub singer, agrees to use her charms to distract the Englishman. Improbable allies Moonface Martin (Pete Steedman), who's Public Enemy No. 13, and gangster's moll Bonnie (Martha Paquin) try to help Billy evade detection.

The cast's theatrical experience varies, but Colley has done such a remarkable job of integrating her team that you barely notice. Yet the actors who play the characters that should stand out are, indeed, standouts. Especially the vivacious Fendler, who previously played Reno in a Barnstable Comedy Club production. Like some of her marvelous gowns, the role fits her like a second skin. She's a refined Reno – as the robust gal goes – but jam-packed with charisma. When she's on stage, she elevates the whole cast. She also has a great sense of comic timing and can sure belt out a song.

## ON STAGE

**What:** "Anything Goes"

**Music and lyrics:** Cole Porter

**Book by:** Guy Bolton, P. G. Wodehouse, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse

**Presented by:** Cotuit Center for the Arts

**When:** 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays through June 12, with matinees at 4 p.m. Sunday and June 12 and 5 p.m. June 5

**Where:** Cotuit Center for the Arts, 4404 Falmouth Road (Route 28)

**Tickets:** \$20, with discounts for seniors and students

**Reservations:** 508-428-0669 or [www.cotuitarts.org](http://www.cotuitarts.org)

a most appealing Billy, full of youthful exuberance and adept at physical humor. Seeing him adopt a string of disguises is one of the highlights of the show. It's also very funny to see Ross, as the strait-laced Oakley, loosen up (a little) as this collector of Americanisms develops "hot pants" for Reno. Steedman is terrific as Moonface, perfectly capturing the softy under the tough-guy persona. Paquin is a delightful sparkler as the ditzy Bonnie.

Donovan isn't to be envied, perhaps, having to play demure and conscientious against all

this silliness. But she does it all nicely, with just a touch of sass, then delivers a most beautiful performance of "All Through the Night," alone and luminous on the upper deck.

"Anything Goes" first wowed Broadway in 1934, attracting crowds in the depths of the Depression. No doubt it cheered people up. Perhaps it's back on Broadway now, slated for an extended run, as a salve to our current economic woes. Certainly Cotuit's production is a likely antidote for any (lower-case) depression. The musical has all those upbeat Cole Porter favorites with toe-tapping rhythms – perennial tunes like "You're the Top," "It's De-Lovely," "I Get a Kick Out

of You" and, of course, "Anything Goes." (Cotuit is doing the songs – and their placement – from the 1962 Broadway revival.)

Musical director Patricia Anderson's five-piece band sounds like a whole orchestra, and every word of every song is crisp and clear. During a rousing production number like "Blow, Gabriel, Blow," the small stage actually seems to expand to Great White Way proportions.

"Anything Goes" is lovely to look at, too, with excellent lighting by Greg Hamm and costumes by Cindy Parker that complement the set. From crisp white sailor uniforms to dresses of white and baby blue for the adorable little girls – it's all picture-perfect.