

Cotuit Center Has Great Set, Music, Dance In 'Anything Goes'

By MARILYN J. ROWLAND

The set for "Anything Goes" is simply magnificent. A splendid ocean liner has docked on the stage at the Cotuit Center for the Arts, beckoning the audience to cast their cares aside and climb onboard for the madcap adventures that lie ahead. Designed by Nicholas Dorr, the ship is two stories high, with staircases on either side of the ship that cast members gracefully dance up and down, and changeable cabins, deftly maneuvered by the stage crew.

One might want to go see the CCftA's production of Cole Porter's 1934 musical, "Anything Goes," for the set alone, but there is much more to this show: a large and talented cast of all ages, great Cole Porter songs sung well by the leads and the chorus, glamorous costumes, and an entertaining storyline.

Directed by Michele Colley, with music direction by Patricia Anderson, "Anything Goes" is a delight from start to finish. Eileen Fendler plays Reno Sweeney, a role she has played before at the Barnstable Comedy Club, and one she seems to have been born to play. Reno, an evangelist-turned-nightclub singer, boards the ship with her chorus of Angels, Purity (Melissa Morin), Patience (Hannah Carrita), Charity (Rachael Kenneally), and Virtue (Katie Koglin), and enlivens whatever scene she is in.

She runs into her old friend Billy Crocker (Evan Eckstrom), a Wall Street broker who is helping his boss, Elisha J. Whitney (Paul Fendler), get settled in aboard ship. Reno and Billy get the show off to a rousing start with "You're the Top." Ms. Fendler does an outstanding job on all her vocal numbers, commanding the stage, with or without the fine chorus. "Blow, Gabriel, Blow" is particularly effective, but she

also shines in "I Get A Kick Out of You," "Anything Goes," "Let's Misbehave," and "Take Me Back to Manhattan."

Mr. Eckstrom, a recent college graduate, gives Billy a warm charm and a youthful exuberance that fit his character well. He has multiple talents, including staggering about the stage in a manner that convinces us that the boat is lurching up and down.

Billy soon meets Hope Harcourt (Kiley Donovan), a woman he met briefly in the past and yearns to rekindle a relationship with. Ms. Donovan and Mr. Eckstrom share a romantic "All Through the Night" later in the show. But, alas, she is engaged to be married to the stodgy Sir Evelyn Oakleigh (Steve Ross), who can find nothing romantic about a moonlit night. Stuffy he may be, but Mr. Ross's Evelyn is also very

funny, deftly wielding a British accent, and keeping a notebook on American expressions, most of which he does not quite understand.

Though he has no ticket or passport, Billy stows away on the boat, in hopes of winning Hope's heart.

Luckily, Moonface Martin (Pete Steedman) and Bonnie (Martha Paquin) show up. Moonface is a gangster, "Enemy No. 13," but is disguised as a minister, and through a series of misunderstandings, provide Billy with the passport and identification he needs, that of their friend Snake Eyes Johnson, Public Enemy No. 1, who missed the boat, so to speak.

Mr. Steedman is just wonderful in this role as the dumb gang-

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ALAN TRUGMAN

Kiley Donovan as Hope Harcourt, Eileen Fendler as Reno Sweeney, and Evan Eckstrom as Billy Crocker, star in the Cotuit Center for the Arts' production of Cole Porter's "Anything Goes." The show runs through June 12.

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ster—with a heart of gold. Moonface happens to be old friends with Reno, too, and he, Billy, and Reno join forces for "Friendship," a great number that showcases the talents of these three engaging actors. Mr. Steedman's "Be Like the Bluebird" is hilarious and his comic timing is perfect, as he advises his friends to "Remember, it is always darkest right before you turn the lights on."

Ms. Paquin is a bundle of outrageous energy and lots of fun to watch, especially in her big number, "Heaven Hop."

Then the plot gets complicated,

as Billy jumps in and out of comical disguises, and other characters scheme and plot, and fall in love. All is resolved by the time the ship reaches London, but not before some great musical numbers are presented. The singers and chorus use every inch of the set, dancing and singing upstairs and down, on the staircases, and even in the aisles. The costumes, including many formal gowns, are designed by Cindy Parker and add elegance and professionalism to the show.

Ms. Anderson conducts and plays bass in the five-piece band, which provides the perfect accompaniment.

Choreography, by Ms. Colley

and Ms. Fendler, is excellent, and lighting design, by Greg Hamm, is very effective in conveying mood and time of day.

The CCftA has thought of everything, down to providing special cocktails for the show (such as the enticing Sweeney Tini) and two art shows that one can enjoy at intermission, or before or after the show.

The Anything Goes Photography exhibition is upstairs and features beautiful photos, many scenic landscapes, from around the world. And "Emerging Images," paintings by Shirley Mossman Nisbet of Falmouth, in the first-floor gallery, provides breathtaking visual images, in shades

of blues and grays and beiges, of abstracted ocean views, sensitively hung so that the horizon line continues from one painting to the next all around the room. It is a show to be savored on its own, but also serves as an appropriate entrance to the ocean voyage to come.

"Anything Goes" continues through June 12, with performances on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 8 PM, and Sunday at 5 PM on June 5 and 4 PM on June 12.

Tickets are \$20. Call 508-428-0669 or visit www.artsonthecape.org to purchase tickets. The arts center is at 4404 Route 28 in Cotuit.