

## THEATER REVIEW | HELLO, DOLLY!

# College show thrives with Broadway touch

By Michael Grossberg  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The addition of Broadway talents has boosted the appeal of the already-superior spring musicals at Otterbein College in Westerville.

Last year's successful *42nd Street* has been followed by *Hello, Dolly!* — which opened Thursday in Cowan Hall.

Two-time Tony nominee John Carrafa choreographs with a jaunty flair and directs with a savvy understanding that the best of the American musical-comedy genre is grounded in motion and emotion.

Jerry Herman's 1964 hit, lovingly adapted by Michael Stewart from Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker*, is a warhorse from Broadway's golden age.

But the show, about seizing second chances, can still run well. At Otterbein, it gallops along with Carrafa's sure-footed guidance, a sparkling orchestra, top-notch design and talented performers.

Given the limitations of any college show, the production is cast superbly. Kari Ringer is charming and amusing as Dolly, with a singing voice even bigger than her smile. Eric Folks is comical but believable as the greedy shopkeeper who becomes the (hard-to-fathom) object of Dolly's desire.

Both actors look mature for their age. Their charismatic and adult voices help, especially when they reprise the duet *It*

► Otterbein College Theatre will present *Hello, Dolly!* at 8 tonight and Saturday night, 2 p.m. Sunday and 8 p.m. May 24-26 in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville. Tickets cost \$25. Call 614-823-1109 or visit [www.otterbein.edu/theatre](http://www.otterbein.edu/theatre).

## Takes a Woman.

One of the pleasures of attending college productions is being among the first to discover up-and-coming talents.

Although Barnaby isn't the leading role, freshman Nathan Keen shines — and his brief footwork is dazzling — as the young, naive feed-store clerk eager to visit the big city and find romance. Watch for Keen to land bigger roles in dance musicals at Otterbein and, later, throughout the country.

Drew Aber is endearing as gawky Cornelius, the aging store clerk who still dreams and schemes to kiss a girl for the first time.

Aber puts all of Cornelius' longing for love into *It Only Takes a Moment*.

Elizabeth Shivenor, as hat-shop proprietor Irene Molloy, adds tender feeling to *Ribbons Down My Back*.

At Wednesday's preview, the rest of the 34-member cast radiated convincing personality.

With an old-fashioned overture and entr'acte, plus curtain and exit music, the pit orchestra seizes its moments in the brassy spotlight under conductor Dennis Davenport.



FRED SQUILLANTE | DISPATCH

Kari Ringer is charming and amusing as the title character in the Otterbein College production of *Hello, Dolly!*

Using an orchestra-encircling ramp for bustling promenades, Carrafa is especially good at blocking and choreographing crowd scenes, which often serve as exclamation points on the song-and-dance numbers that start small but build.

As its title suggests, the whole show is one big exclamation point about the rewards of enterprise in America.

New York in the 1890s becomes a sepia-tinged series of postcards, thanks to Rob

Johnson's versatile moving sets, Jayson Pritchard's golden lighting and Marcia Hain's muted period costumes (all the better to contrast with the dazzling red gown that accents Dolly's emblematic entrance down the restaurant staircase).

Even if it can't surpass the dancing thrills of last season's *42nd Street*, this dreamy *Dolly!* should give theatergoers a whale of a good time.

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# Otterbein dishes up tasty comfort food

By Michael Grossberg

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

In real life, anyone who took over a struggling café in an economically depressed town would probably lose his shirt.

Yet that's reason enough for a happy ending in *The Spitfire Grill*, the wispy musical fable that ends the Otterbein Summer Theatre season on a sweet but implausibly hopeful note.

Composer-author James Valcq and author-lyricist Fred Alley transplanted their musical adaptation of the 1996 film from Maine to the Wisconsin town of Gilead in the 1980s. It might as well be Brigadoon in a more legendary era.

No matter: The characters — and strong characterizations — make Otterbein's nuanced production work well enough for a heart-warming and amusing evening. Lovely singing helps, too, although the score stays in such a narrow range of country- and folk-inflected harmonies that the songs blur together by the second act.

Director David Caldwell helps the seven-member student cast ground the fantasy in some psychological realism.

Kari Ringer — who shone recently in the title role of Otterbein's *Hello, Dolly!* — triumphs again as another plucky woman searching for a second chance. Ringer finds grit and dreamy passion in Percy, a parolee who moves to Gilead to fulfill her dreams and finds a job at the Spitfire Grill. Employing one of the best singing voices at Otterbein, Ringer excels on *Shine* and *A Ring Around the Moon*.

Caitlin Scott projects warmth and quiet determination as Shelby Thorpe, who works at the grill despite the objections of her hus-

► *The Spitfire Grill* will be presented at 8 tonight and 2 p.m. Sunday — and 8 p.m. Thursday through next Saturday, 2 p.m. Aug. 5 and 8 p.m. Aug. 9-11 — in the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Westerville. Tickets cost \$25. Call 614-823-1109 or visit [www.otterbein.edu/theatre](http://www.otterbein.edu/theatre).

band. Scott's voice is lovely, too: Her solos (*When Hope Goes*, *Wild Bird*) are full of emotion. When Ringer and Scott join forces on *The Colors of Paradise*, it's truly almost paradise.

Cassie Barker is convincing and empathetic as Hannah Ferguson, the aging proprietor. Her renditions of *Forgotten Lullaby* and *Way Back Home* convey authority and wisdom.

The male roles seem underwritten. Yet Steve Czarnecki finds dimensions as Sheriff Joe Sutter, while Drew Aber avoids villainous stereotypes as Caleb Thorpe, Shelby's prejudiced and fearful husband.

Elizabeth Shivener earns laughs in the one-dimensional role of Effy Krayneck, the nosy postmaster.

Kudos to the small orchestra. Dan Clark's cello, Meg Barkhymer's violin and Spencer Elliot's guitar and mandolin bring out the twangy, plaintive songs.

Rob Johnson's rustic scenic design suggests an entire community, slightly idealized under Jayson Pritchard's golden lighting.

Aside from a few melodramatic secrets revealed late, there isn't much drama in the fable about people struggling to come to terms with change and one another.

Still, those who enjoyed Otterbein's 2004 production of *Violet* — another wistful but more poignant musical — might find *Spitfire* almost as appealing.

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# ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

## Matchmaker at center of fun, breezy Otterbein production

By DENNIS THOMPSON

Suburban News Theater Critic

Otterbein College Theatre's spring musical is *Hello, Dolly!*, the 1964 Tony Award winner that was a star vehicle for Carol Channing. The 1969 movie version didn't exactly hurt Barbara Streisand, either.

One of the most venerable musicals of the American theater, *Hello, Dolly!* is by Michael Stewart and Jerry Herman and is based on the Thornton Wilder play *The Matchmaker*.

Set in the New York City of the 1890s, it features Dolly Levi, a vivacious widowed matchmaker who seems an expert on everything. She is matching up the prominent Horace Vandergelder with a wife, though she has decided that she would be best for that position. Now she just has to convince him.

Entangled in these doings are the adventures of Vandergelder's clerks, Cornelius Hackl and

Barnaby Tucker, who, unbeknownst to their boss, take off for the city, where they encounter milliner Irene Molloy and her assistant Minnie Fay. Also romantically involved behind his back are Horace's niece Ermengarde and Ambrose Kemper.

Dolly is, of course, involved in all of this.

This is a fun musical with energetic and breezy characters, cat-and-mouse situations and memorable music. In addition to the famous title number, this is the show that brought us *Put on Your Sunday Clothes*, *It Only Takes a Moment*, *Elegance* and *Before the Parade Passes By*.

I'm always amazed at the professional quality of Otterbein's musicals. The intricate choreogra-



REVIEW

phy by Director John Carrafa, particularly in numbers such as Act II's the *Waiter's Galop*, are a joy to watch.

The hide-and-seek scene in the dress shop is great fun. Ensemble scenes and singing add to the power.

The best singers include Kari Ringer as Dolly, Elizabeth Shivener as Irene and Drew Aber as Cornelius. They give the strongest acting performances as well.

Ringer's Dolly is a delight. She is a presence, a beautiful voice and captures the flurry of her dialogue with just the right tone and rhythm.

Shivener's Irene is equally strong in both voice and manner. Aber balances his naivete with the bluster of true love. The chemistry between these two comes off very well.

Nathan Keen is bubbly youth as Baranaby, nicely balanced by the perkiness of Claire Longest as Minnie. David Baghat adds comical earnestness as Ambrose, and Meredith Holo-

muzki-Zgonc's constant crying as Ermengarde is quite funny.

I had concerns with the direction that Eric Folks took Horace. The character is often described as "grumpy" or a "curmudgeon." But Folks' Horace is downright mean and rude. Even at the end, moments before his transformation that seemingly comes out of the blue, he is insulting to a man he later says he is trying to help.

We know that Dolly is marrying him partially for his money, but we hope there is more than that, and we see little in him that makes us want her to end up with him.

But in the big picture, that is just a character blip. The whole plays together quite nicely, looks and sounds beautiful and is great fun to watch.

Otterbein College Theatre's *Hello Dolly!* continues at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday at Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville. For reservations call 614-823-1109.



# Hello, Dolly. Goodbye, Broadway-caliber shows.

BY RICHARD ADES

389

In an attempt to make lightning strike twice, Otterbein is again relying on Broadway talent.

Last year's spring musical, *42nd Street*, was staged with the help of a director and two other backstage professionals from the Great White Way. The trio, along with a fleet-footed cast, put on a show that was boisterously entertaining.

This year, Broadway choreographer John Carrafa is directing and choreographing **Hello, Dolly!** Is the result a slam-bang success of similar magnitude?

Well, no, but that's not surprising. The saga of Dolly Levi is much less flashy than its predecessor.

*Dolly!* is really a star vehicle for the actor playing the title role, while the true star of *42nd Street* was the stageful of dancing feet. There's dancing in the current show, naturally, but it's more low-key, as befits the tale's era, the 1890s.

So while Carrafa's production has moments that will impress you—notably "Waiters' Gallop" in Act 2—it has nothing that will leave you in a state of wide-eyed amazement.

That's not a problem, especially since you can get all the amazement you need down at the Ohio Expo Center from Cirque du Soleil's *Circo*.

What is more of a problem is that the production gives us little reason to care about the show's main plot, which involves matchmaker Dolly's attempt to snare "half-a-millionaire" Horace Vandergelder for herself. As played by Eric Folks, the Scrooge-like business owner is so unlikable that we can't help feeling Dolly is better off with her memories of her beloved late husband.

Playing Dolly, Kari Ringer is hampered by the fact that she doesn't have the kind of bigger-than-life personality exhibited by the most successful Dollys (Carol Channing onstage, Barbra Streisand on the silver screen). Still, she's spunky and pleasant, and she sings nicely.



**She's missing that larger-than-life personality of the most successful Dollys: Kari Ringer and the cast of Hello, Dolly!**

Though we don't care whether Dolly gets her man, we do care about two budding romances involving Vandergelder's employees, Barnaby and Cornelius (Nathan Keen and Drew Aber). When they take a day off to find an adventure in New York City, they end up in the women's hat shop run by widow Irene Molloy (Elizabeth Shivener) and her employee, Minnie (Claire Longest).

Aber's Cornelius and Shivener's Irene make an engaging couple-to-be, and both sing well, though Shivener's pitch strayed a handful of times at the performance I saw. Meanwhile, Keen and Longest provide a more comical take on romance as Barnaby and Minnie.

The show's songs, by Jerry Herman, are mostly unmemorable except for the title number. But they're likable enough, and the singers and band perform them energetically under Dennis Davenport's direction.

Rob Johnson's set is most notable for a stage that wraps around the orchestra pit, as well as backdrop illustrations that resemble vintage postcards. But it's Marcia Hain's attractive costumes that are most responsible for transporting us back to the 1890s.

Sadly, unlike last year's *42nd Street, Hello, Dolly!* doesn't transport us to Broadway in the process.

## There's nothing about Mary

Maybe I'm just not feeling empathetic this week.

At Otterbein, I failed to care whether the title character in *Hello, Dolly!* found a husband. And at OSU, where **Mary Stuart** opened last week before heading down to German Village's Schiller Park, I couldn't have cared less whether the title character lived or died.

Not that her fate was in question for anyone who knows the history of Mary, Queen of Scots. German playwright Friedrich von Schiller may have taken liberties with the facts in his 1800 play, but he couldn't change the outcome of Mary's power struggle with England's first Queen Elizabeth.

So why didn't I care about what happens to Mary? Maybe because it's not clear that she doesn't deserve to be in the English prison cell where she's been languishing for years. After all, one of the deeds that put her there was her alleged complicity in her husband's murder.

Of course, it could be that he deserved to go. But we'll never know because the main defense of Mary we hear is a supporter's assertion that she was very young at the time.

But before you start blaming Schiller for not giving us enough information, be aware that he lays a whole lot of facts on viewers—along with a whole lot of characters—in the first act. It's only in Act 2 that he begins to reward us by livening things up.

The dramatic fireworks take off when Schiller presents his prime departure from historical fact, a meeting between Mary and Elizabeth. Mary tries her best to keep her royal ego in check, but she fails miserably, probably sealing her fate.

On the way to the inevitable, though, Schiller plies us with an offstage assassination attempt, an onstage suicide, romantic intrigue and enough deception to fill three seasons of TV's 24.

Director John S. Kuhn does a respectable job on this first collaboration between OSU's theater department and Actors' Theatre, the



THEATER

troupe that performs outdoors in the playwright's namesake, Schiller Park.

In the lead roles, Eleni Papaleonardos's Mary is as haughty as Julie Ann

McMillan's Elizabeth is imperious, but both show flashes of weakness and indecision. And neither is above using flirtation to influence the men around them.

Among the performers playing those men, the most impressive is Scott D. Wilson as the ancient Earl of Shrewsbury. Also strong are Equity actor Kalafatic Poole as Lord Burleigh and Zach Hartley as Mary's jailer, Sir Amyas Paulet.

However, D. Dwayne Blackaller could make a stronger impression as the Earl of Leicester, who seems to have romantic connections to both queens. Blackaller cuts a dashing figure, but he's too stiff to show us the man's complicated inner workings.

Scenic designer Elli Loomis's set, which probably won't be as elaborate in Schiller Park as it was at OSU, includes a massive structure that resembles the hands of a clock.

It's a fitting symbol for a play about a queen whose time—whether we care or not—is about to run out.

## INFORMATION

Otterbein College Theatre will present *Hello, Dolly!* at 8 p.m. today through Saturday in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville. Running time: 2 hours, 30 minutes. Tickets are \$25. 823-1109.

## INFORMATION

The Ohio State University Department of Theatre and Actors' Theatre will present *Mary Stuart* at 8 p.m. today through Sunday and June 7-10 and 14-17 in Schiller Park, 1069 Jaeger St. in German Village. Running time: 2 hours, 50 minutes (including intermission). Free. Bring a blanket or lawn chair. 444-6888.



# theater

weekender • a guide for people on the go

## now onstage

### Spring Fever

SHADOWBOX, EASTON TOWN CENTER (614-416-7625, WWW.SHADOWBOXCABARET.COM)

Fans and newcomers can have a good time at this themed show, especially with Britney Spears, Keith Richards and other denizens of our celebrity culture being given a hard time in parodic skits. Intended for mature audiences, the two-act show should be especially appealing to aging boomers.

**SHOWTIMES** » 7:30 p.m. Thursdays and 10:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through June 9

**TICKETS** » \$30, or \$20 for students and senior citizens

Dolly Levi (Kari Ringer) in the Otterbein College production of *Hello, Dolly!*

### Theatre Roulette 2007: A Festival of New Work

MADLAB THEATRE, 105 N. GRANT AVE. (614-221-5418, WWW.MADLAB.NET)

The company's annual repertory whirlwind is always a grab bag, so take your pick of three evenings of new short plays from 14 writers. Expect satirical twists on provocative subjects, from abortion to difficult families. And expect a few duds amid the hits.

**SHOWTIMES** » "Foreshadows" (The Apple, Please Remove This Stuffed Animal From My Head, Tangled): 8 p.m. Saturday and next Thursday, and 2 p.m. May 26

"Flashbacks" (The Cat in Her Head, Saver, Child's Play, On the Porch One Crisp Spring Morning): 8 tonight and next Thursday night, and 4 p.m. May 26

"Foolishness" (Hush Little Baby, Impulsive, The Inciting Incident, Family Portrait): 8 p.m. Friday and May 26

**TICKETS** » \$10 to \$15, or \$8 for students and senior citizens, \$6 for members

## ONLINE CONTENT

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## COVER STORY

### 'DOLLY!' STEPS INTO BIG SHOES

BY MICHAEL GROSSBERG  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

For Otterbein College Theatre, *42nd Street* is a tough act to follow. The program's popular spring musical of 2006, after all, set Otterbein box-office records.

How to top that? Call on *Dolly!*

"As with everything else in the theater world, no one can promise that one production will be better than another — any more than OSU can promise that next year's football team will make it to the national-championship game," said John Stefano, chairman of Otterbein's Theater and Dance Department.

"But we can promise that this will be the very best *Hello, Dolly!* that we can create — and that our audiences will be delighted in what they see and hear."

With the department set to begin a seven-show run of *Dolly!* tonight in Cowan Hall, much of what worked last year seems to apply again this year.

Here, then, are five reasons that similarly large audiences are likely to greet the musical with open arms.

#### 1. A BIG TO-DO

From the elaborate dance sequences to the melodic and memorable songs, *Hello, Dolly!* ranks with *42nd Street* among the biggest

See **DOLLY!** Page 19

### Hello, Dolly!

OTTERBEIN COLLEGE THEATRE, COWAN HALL, 30 S. GROVE ST., WESTERVILLE (614-823-1109, WWW.OTTERBEIN.EDU/THEATRE)

**SHOWTIMES** » 7:30 tonight, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday and 8 p.m. next Thursday through May 26

**TICKETS** » \$25 at the door



#### 1. 42nd Street (2006)

7,513 (including three sold-out performances with standing room only)



#### 2. West Side Story (2000)

6,922



#### 3. Crazy for You (1998)

5,964



#### 4. Oklahoma! (2001)

5,963



#### 5. Jesus Christ Superstar (2005)

5,008

## DOLLY!

FROM PAGE 18

Broadway musicals.

"Hello, Dolly!" is an American classic," guest choreographer-director John Carrafa said.

"It was originally developed by a choreographer (Gower Champion, who later developed *42nd Street*), so dance was a big part of the structure of the piece."

#### 2. BROADWAY CALIBER

Carrafa was hired from New York to choreograph and direct the Otterbein musical — the approach that brought winning results a year ago, when Otterbein asked Columbus native Randy Skinner (a Tony nominee for the revival of *42nd Street*) to return from New York to supervise a hand-picked Broadway choreographer-director team for *42nd Street*.

Carrafa, one of only three choreographers nominated for two Tony awards in the same year (2002), received nominations for *Urinetown: The Musical* and the first Broadway revival of *Into the Woods*.

The up-and-coming Broadway talent is a self-avowed fan of Jerry Herman musicals.

Thus, he said, he leapt at the chance to direct and choreograph the 1964 Tony winner for best musical.

#### 3. THE 'WILDER' FACTOR

Herman composed the score and author Michael Stewart adapted *Hello, Dolly!* from *The Matchmaker*, Thornton Wilder's play about an indomitable 19th-century Jewish woman who makes the most of her life in America.

"It's a very moving story about second chances, finding love for the first or second time



FRED SQUILLANTE | DISPATCH

Guest director John Carrafa, right, who earned two Tony nominations for choreography the same year

in a more innocent era," Carrafa said.

"And the musical is also about the American dream of making it if you work hard."

The secret to the musical's success, Otterbein's Stefano said, is its source material.

Wilder, most noted for the beloved *Our Town*, wrote with warmth, clarity and simplicity about America at its best, Stefano said.

"*42nd Street* was based on a charming movie musical from the 1930s, but *Hello, Dolly!* is based on one of the great American plays of the 20th century."

#### 4. A COOPERATIVE SPIRIT

Otterbein has developed a solid reputation for well-staged,

### Tuneful show

Singing and dancing sequences help make *Hello, Dolly!* a winner. The big numbers in the musical, in order of appearance:

- » Put on Your Sunday Clothes
- » Dancing
- » Elegance
- » Waiter's Gallop
- » Hello, Dolly!
- » Polka

well-acted musicals.

A big factor: The Theater and Dance Department co-produces its annual spring musicals with the Music Department.

"Many other colleges don't have such collaborations on musicals between those departments, but Otterbein has a long history of cooperation between the music program and the theater and dance program," said Dennis Davenport, music director and conductor of the 23-person pit orchestra.

"It's a good combination of skills."

After seeing *42nd Street* with her husband, Dick, and granddaughter Amber Scott, Westinghouse is among the more than 3,400 people who have purchased advance tickets for *Hello, Dolly!*

"The dancing in *42nd Street* was wonderful," the 73-year-old said. "Even if *Hello, Dolly!* is not quite as good, ... it should still be excellent."

#### 5. AUDIENCE SUPPORT

Otterbein can put a lot of money, talent and energy into its musicals because it can count on a large and loyal audience.

Among those hooked: Columbus resident Larry Hansgen, a veteran subscriber

who for more than a decade has taken a group from his church, Good Shepherd United Methodist, to see the annual spring musical.

Fifteen people in his musical-mad contingent, including wife Marty, will have dinner tonight before seeing *Hello, Dolly!*

"They always go on opening night, he said, so they can attend the post-show reception and meet the cast."

"The acting, the dancing and the music are really first-rate, and for a lot less money than you pay to go to the Broadway series."

His group heartily enjoyed *Oklahoma!* (2001), *West Side Story* (2000), *Crazy for You* (1998) and *Big River* (1993) but considered *42nd Street* probably the best college production it had seen, said Hansgen, 72.

And *Dolly!*

"I'm hoping it will be every bit as good as *42nd Street*, but that's a pretty tough nut to crack. I'm not going to expect it to be better, but I have confidence that it will be pretty close."

Mary Westinghouse of New Albany will be back for her second Otterbein musical after her inaugural experience last year.

"I thought, 'What have I been missing here?'" she said. "It's like visiting New York."

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