

Otterbein taps Broadway veterans for musical

Otterbein College Theatre is getting tap-happy for its season finale.

Randy Skinner and two associates have been working to ensure that the dancing feet that audiences meet in *42nd Street* will be close to Skinner's recent Broadway revival.

"Of course, we have to cut it down a bit because Otterbein has a slightly smaller cast than Broadway," he said.

He is supervising the production, which is directed by Tripp Phillips, stage manager of the Broadway revival, and choreographed by Kelli Barclay, Skinner's assistant.



**MICHAEL
GROSSBERG**

Skinner, a central Ohio native and Ohio State University graduate, assisted Gower Champion in choreographing the original 1981 Broadway show. He expanded and reworked the choreography for the revival.

"*42nd Street* is so dance-driven — everything from tap to theater jazz, partnering and some ballroom stuff — that the featured parts and the chorus are the real stars of the show."

The stage musical was adapted from the famous 1933 movie musical about a chorus girl who becomes a star.

"*42nd Street* is everyone's journey, and a favorite to anyone who lives in New York or who has dreamed of going to New York with dreams in their pocket," Barclay said.

It has more than 15 dance numbers. "The whole show is dance. If they're not dancing, they're changing costumes, so we have to also choreograph it backstage," Barclay said.

"What is rewarding for me is watching the students grow. I can't believe how far they've come from day one."

Two big numbers that Skinner added to the revival have been modified for Otterbein.

"But we're putting on the big curtain call at the end, when all the kids come out and do the big dance after the bows," Skinner said. "It will be one last splash of tap-dancing."

Showtimes are 7:30 tonight, 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday — and 8 p.m. May 25-27 — in Cowan



FILE PHOTO

Rehearsing a number in the Otterbein College Theatre production of *42nd Street*, from left: Kari Ringer, Kyle Bailey, Matt Johnson, Brett Kemp, Ali Cooper, Molly Harris, Robert Hartwell, Sean Miliff and Kelly Skidmore

Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville. Tickets cost \$20. Call 614-823-1109.

Roulette reviews

MadLab's Theatre Roulette flirts with romantic relationships, but its primary focus is obsession.

The troupe's young playwrights have fun — and want the audience to have fun, too — in the seventh annual rotating lineup of new short plays, continuing through May 27 at 105 N. Grant Ave.

Most of the 10 plays explore characters whose obsessions take them to comic and dramatic (or just silly) extremes.

An artful structure, overlapping dialogue, nuanced performances and carefully alternating points of view make *The Rebuttal* intriguing.

Jennifer Barlup and Andy Batt play former lovers separately looking back at their relationship in Jennifer Feather's meditation on love. Melissa Bair and Josh Kessler, dressed as mimes but speaking, act out the couple's history in

a kabuki-style ritual of remembrance.

A textured performance by Joe Lorenzo, formerly of 2Co's Cabaret, brings out the poignancy and humor of *Jams & Jellies*, Donald Dewey's portrait of a recently blinded man who takes out his frustrations on a paid reader (Vanessa Forster).

Greek to Me and *The Happy Lobster* have the most comic potential — but are among the longest.

A large cast finds the double-edged farce and stylized neoclassical cadences in *Greek*, Kristina Meek's high-school parody of ancient Greek tragedies. The mock-Shakespearean dialogue is clever, while the melodramatic exaggerations often mimic the angst of adolescence.

Jim Azelvandre plays an obsessed restaurant employee encouraging Scott Wilson's applicant to embrace his manic vision in *Lobster*, William Whitehurst's cartoon about a job interview.

Both pieces might double the laughs if they were cut in half.

Jams and *Lobster* are presented with

Level Four, Susan Hunter's gimmicky and violent video-game parody, and *Say No More*, Michael Kimball's disturbing vignette about the sexual repartee at a dinner party, in "Crustaceans & Frustrations," whose run continues at 8 p.m. Friday and May 27.

Greek and *Rebuttal* are presented with Azelvandre's paranoid surveillance spoof *Mr. Jones Has a Day* in "Bad News & Rendezvous," whose run continues at 8 tonight and May 26 and 4 p.m. May 27.

The silliest evening — about one man's ridiculous obsession with a shirt, another man's almost-convincing obsession with a woman's stockings and two couples' half-baked romantic obsessions — is "Textiles & Fake Smiles," whose run continues at 8 p.m. Saturday and next Thursday and 2 p.m. May 27.

For more information, call 614-470-2333.

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GERMAN VILLAGE GAZETTE
COLUMBUS, OH
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389 Otterbein's stroll down '42nd Street' is a pleasant one

By DENNIS THOMPSON

Suburban News Theater Critic

Otterbein College Theatre's spring musical is *42nd Street*, Michael Seward and Mark Bramble's look at the making of a Broadway musical.

Most recently revived on Broadway in 2001, it benefits here from Otterbein's influence and alumni connections.

Randy Skinner, the Broadway revival's choreographer, is the production supervisor, while Tripp Phillips, the Broadway stage manager, directs, and Kellie Barclay, the assistant to the choreographer on Broadway, is the choreographer.

The story follows the adventures of an aspiring chorus girl, Peggy Sawyer, on her road to stardom.

In the "gee whiz, kids, let's put on a show" spirit, the music by Harry Warren and Al Dubin includes, in addition to the title number, the well-known tunes *We're in the Money*, *Lullaby of Broadway*, *Shuffle Off to Buffalo* and *I Only Have Eyes for You*.

This show is a delight from start to finish. Nothing dark or shaded here, nothing that requires thought of any kind; it's old-fashioned entertainment, a song-and-dance extravaganza.

Tracing the old fable of the kid off the bus in the big city becoming a star, it leads us through the putting on of a Broadway show in the '30s.

Everyone sings and dances with a big smile on their face. And do they ever sing and dance.

The choreography is so sharp and executed



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so flawlessly, both individually and in the large numbers. From the first scene, in which the curtain is raised just enough so we can see the ensemble's feet, we are impressed by the dancing.

Likewise, the singing is exceedingly strong, both solos and chorus. A large cast so adept at singing, dancing and acting can be a rarity in college productions, but we come to expect that from Otterbein.

Even so, we have to remind ourselves here that this is not a professional production.

The direction and execution is so brisk that scenes move seamlessly from intimacy into large production numbers. Rob Johnson's set design and Kate Robbins' colorful costumes add to the spectacle.

Music director Dennis Davenport conducts a 21-piece orchestra that sounds great.

The student cast is uniformly strong as singers, dancers and actors.

Particular favorites are Selina Verastigui as the effervescent Sawyer, David Caamano as Billy Lawlor, the tenor interested in Sawyer, and Meg Ward as the rambunctious Maggie Jones.

Also strong are Kate Murphy as Dorothy Brock, the fading star, and Chris Carter as the gruff director, Julian Marsh. Actually, there is not a weak link in the whole cast.

The entire show is performed with such skill and vitality, the nearly 2½ breezes by.

Otterbein College Theatre's *42nd Street* continues at 8 p.m. today through Saturday in the Fritsche Theatre of Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville. Tickets are \$20. For more information call 614-823-1109.

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THEATER REVIEW | 42ND STREET

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Talented cast kicks up its heels in joyous production of musical

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By Michael Grossberg
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The dancing is downright thrilling, the production spectacular.

The folks behind Otterbein College Theatre are calling *42nd Street* perhaps their best and biggest musical production ever.

That's no ballyhoo. In my two decades as a *Dispatch* critic, this giddy, gaudy treat is the best staging of a musical I've seen on a campus known for its musicals. It's also the most elaborate, polished and dance-crazy show ever staged there.

Under the supervision of Broadway pros such as Randy Skinner (who assisted director Gower Champion for the original 1981 musical), the top-notch student cast shines in every song and dance.

At Wednesday's preview in Cowan Hall, the performers made the clichéd characters and star-is-born plot of the 1930s-era musical seem fresh.

Despite its reputation, the 1981 Tony winner was never a great musical. But it does rank as one of the most enjoyable dance musicals. Skinner, co-director and choreographer of the Tony-winning 2001 New York revival, demonstrates how much he learned from Champion in 1981.

Did I mention the terrific tap-dancing? The chorus kicks up a syncopated storm, from the opening *Audition* to the dazzling title number and extended encore after the finale.

Director Tripp Phillips and choreographer Kelli Barclay,

42nd Street, an Otterbein College Theatre production of the musical. Supervised by Randy Skinner. Directed by Tripp Phillips. Choreographed by Kelli Barclay.

Julian Marsh.....Chris Carter
Dorothy Brock.....Kate Murphy
Peggy Sawyer.....Selina Verastigui
Billy Lawlor.....David Caamano
Maggie Jones.....Meg Ward
Bert Barry.....David Bahgat

Meet those dancing feet.

Being presented at 8 tonight and Saturday night, and 2 p.m. Sunday — and 8 p.m. May 25-27 — in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St., Westerville.

Tickets cost \$20. Call 614-823-1109.

Skinner's associates, ensure Otterbein's fidelity to the Broadway revival, give or take a few minor adjustments. Some viewers might miss the giant mirror that in New York reflected the rotating circles of chorus girls in *Keep Young and Beautiful*, one of two big numbers added from the revival, but the Busby Berkeley-style homage still works its magic.

Those lucky enough to see this sure-to-sell-out show won't be able to stop talking about the dancers and singers, starting with Selina Verastigui's protean Peggy Sawyer.

As Sawyer rises from the chorus line to star in *Pretty Lady*, the retro musical-within-the-musical, Verastigui grounds her journey in pluck and heart.

Despite their relative youth in the two most mature roles,

Chris Carter and Kate Murphy project seasoned authority as the savvy director and imperious star of *Pretty Lady*.

David Caamano, a vibrant singer, is ardent and innocent as ingenue Billy Lawlor.

But the delightful surprise of this college production is Meg Ward, a constantly inventive and vivacious scene-stealer as writer-producer Maggie Jones.

Backed by a nimble bevy of synchronized chorus girls, Ward and David Bahgat, as her charming writer-partner, send *Shuffle Off to Buffalo* off this mortal coil and into musical-comedy heaven.

Dennis Davenport's spiffy musical direction ensures a creamy sound from the 21-member pit orchestra, especially tuneful when backing up *Dames, I Only Have Eyes for You* and the glorious *We're in the Money*.

The production wouldn't be as lovely without Kate Robbins' gorgeous period costumes, Rob Johnson's art-deco-influenced scenery and Stephen Sakowski's romantic lighting.

I can't stop praising the dancers or the choreography, which artfully accomplishes everything from bridging scenes (*Go Into Your Dance*) to showing off the company (*Getting Out of Town*) at its nimble best.

Congratulations, kids: You may have gone onstage as students, but you'll end the run of Otterbein's snazzy season finale as pros-in-the-making.
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