

THEATER REVIEW

Otterbein's 'La Mancha' is a dream production

By Michael Grossberg
Dispatch Theater Critic

Otterbein College Theatre has built a high reputation for its strong spring musicals. *Man of La Mancha*, which continues through Sunday on the Westerville campus, won't let audiences down.

This is a remarkably self-assured student revival of the 1966 Tony winner for best musical, from its bold staging to fine singing and acting.

Director Dennis Romer inspires his 32-member student ensemble to accentuate most highlights in the show's artful contrast of idealistic fantasy and grim reality, Don Quixote's brave tilting at windmills and Miguel de Cervantes' equally brave tribulations with the Inquisition.

Kudos to scenic designer Robert Johnson, for his convincing dungeon and moving drawbridge/staircase; to costume designer John Gutknecht, for his realistic peasant rags and glinting Spanish armor; and to Fred Thayer, for his lurid, smoky lighting.

Guest choreographer Patricia Hiatt makes the Muleteers' abduction of Aldonza convincing.

Colby Paul, one of central Ohio's most vivid student actresses, gives Aldonza the angry, feisty pride of a wanton tigress.

Aldonza's resistance to Quixote's desire to elevate her from the gutter to Dulcinea's pedestal is high-spirited and often hilarious; her ultimate acceptance of a softer, sweeter name is touching.

At Wednesday's student preview, Jess Hanks seemed slightly more credible as Cervantes than Don Quixote, his fictional alter ego. Hanks projects an austere gravity as the beleaguered, imprisoned poet, but his "knight errant" needs more

AT A GLANCE

■ *Man of La Mancha*, Otterbein College Theatre's student production of the musical about *Don Quixote*. Directed by Dennis Romer.

Cervantes/Don Quixote.....Jess Hanks
Sancho Panza.....Scott Wilson
Aldonza/DulcineaColby Paul
AntoniaKaty Bowers

Solid cast, strong singing, impressive set and staging

■ Performances at 8 tonight through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday in Cowan Hall, 30 N. Grove St.

■ Tickets: \$9 or \$10. Call 898-1109.

madcap passion, fervor and flair.

For now, at least, the manic gleam in this Quixote's eye is missing.

Even so, Hanks' rich tenor makes *The Impossible Dream* an unalloyed delight. Paul joins him for the stirring reprise; composer Mitch Leigh and lyricist Joe Darion's soaring, showstopper is sturdy enough to bear a second reprise for the finale.

Notable among other lilting voices: Todd Alan Crain's Padre and Katy Bowers' Antonia.

Scott Wilson's roly-poly Sancho Panza provides ample comic relief. Wilson, who makes *I Really Like Him* even funnier with an affected, high-strung voice, might be all of the Three Stooges rolled into one.

Bryan Brems and Douglas Geib's Horses are playful imps.

Don Quixote, the West's first major novel, has been called a "monument to human wit and folly."

At Otterbein, the musical it inspired is a monument to some promising young talent.

Letters

Westerville News
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Man finds jewel in Otterbein theater production

To the Editor:

My wife and I recently attended Otterbein College's presentation of the *Man of La Mancha*.

What can I say? It was wonderful!

I must admit I wasn't particularly enthused about seeing a college theater group performing a musical. Furthermore, the basketball playoffs were on television, and I wanted to watch the antics of the great Magic Johnson.

My wife told me to tape the game and get ready to go. Reluctantly I set the videocassette recorder, and against my better instincts, we trekked off to Otterbein.

This was not simply a group of college students putting on a play. This was a group of gifted and hard-working actors and actresses who just happen to be college students.

I was captivated from the opening curtain to the finale. The lighting was good, the costumes were authentic and detailed and the limited number of props were well used. The music was extraordinary.

I happily sat through two hours of flawless entertainment, and I cherish every

minute of it. The entire cast was splendid.

A particular favorite of mine was the character of Aldonza played by Colby Anne Paul. In the play, Aldonza was an alley cat and the local trollop. An intense performance brought the complex Aldonza to life right before my eyes.

There's no doubt in my mind this was big-time theater at its best, and I'm delighted my wife suggested we attend.

I enjoyed being entertained by this talented group of young people who delivered a Broadway-like performance with quality, professionalism and genuine talent.

All the years I lived in Westerville I never thought much about Cowan Hall on Grove Street.

After seeing *Man of La Mancha*, my eyes and mind are newly stimulated to this jewel called Otterbein theater.

I don't pretend to be a skilled theater critic, but I do know a good thing when I see it.

You can bet the farm you'll see me, the Man of La Martin, in the audience many, many times in the future.

Jim Martin
Westerville