

# ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

## Musical 'Cafe' doesn't need a storyline to move audience

By DENNIS THOMPSON

Suburban News Theater Critic

Otterbein College Theatre offers *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, a retrospective of the musical works of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller.

Maybe those names are not familiar to you, but their music probably is. Leiber and Stoller wrote 24 songs recorded by Elvis Presley, half written specifically for him. The duo also wrote for the Drifters, the Coasters and a variety of groups and individuals beginning in the 1950s with the golden age of rock and roll, continuing into the 1980s.

If you're old enough to have followed rock and roll over the past half century, recognizing the music but not always aware of who wrote it, this may surprise you. Would you have thought that *Hound Dog* and *Jail House Rock* were written by the same team who penned *Yakety Yak*, *Love Potion No. 9*, *On Broadway, I'm a Woman*, and *Stand By Me*?

The claim that Leiber and Stoller "virtually invented rock and roll" could be easily argued.

A vibrant, fresh-faced cast of 10 Otterbein students drives nonstop (well, there is an intermission) through 39 Leiber and Stoller numbers — some more familiar than others, but all entertaining.

Director John Stefano ensures an energetic pace, animated expressions, playful energy and some clever staging touches. Sue Sauer's choreography leans heavily on 1950s she-bop, but that's the main era being



### REVIEW

portrayed.

D. Glen Vanderbilt's set is black floor, black back wall with red neon 'Smokey Joe's Cafe' sign. A black half wall shields Music Director Dennis Davenport and his six-piece orchestra

who are centered throughout and provide the accompaniment.

The company consists of Barbara Jo Bednarczuk, Troy Burton, Matt Johnson, Kolby Kindle, Sara King, Kari Ringer, Caitlin Scott, Cesar Anthony Villavicencio, Trenton Weaver, and Angel Young.

An early number, *Young Blood*, seems appropriate. While several members of the company have had supporting roles in past Otterbein productions, with the notable exception of Ringer, there are many fresh faces stepping forward here in a significant way.

There are no weak links; each performer brings their own style and vocal tenor to their numbers and each has their moments to shine. Each time I think to single one out, another comes on equally strong.

I will note that Young has perhaps the strongest voice for sheer vocal power, with Johnson nearly as robust among the males. King and Ringer often bring a fervent sensuality, particularly on their duet of *Trouble*.

Weaver contributes a classic bass voice to several numbers and combines with Ringer

for a cute rendition of *You're the Boss*. Stephano's staging of the supporting suits in *Shoppin' For Clothes* is quite fun.

There are program notes that try to establish a framework, as a high school reunion remembering the past, showing moments of life experiences.

These frameworks may be helpful for the back stories during the rehearsal process, but they mean nothing to us and we see none of it. So why even mention it — this is simply a revue of songs and that's fine, as it's snappy, nostalgic and entertaining.

The opening night audience was primarily the age of those who grew up with this music (Otterbein students apparently study

on weeknights). Heads were nodding and feet were tapping throughout.

The woman next to me was swaying so hard I thought she'd fall into me. My chair was vibrating as the row behind me was tapping their feet so hard.

It's that kind of show; no dialogue, just one well staged hit after another. This is breezy and charming.

Otterbein College Theatre's *Smokey Joe's Cafe* continues at 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays through Oct. 25 at the Campus Center Theatre, 100 W. Home St., Westerville. Tickets are \$20. For more information call 614-823-1109.

## LIBRARY NOTES

Upcoming programs at the Westerville Public Library, 126 S. State St., are listed below. If registration is required, or more information is needed, call 614-882-7277 or visit [westervillelibrary.org](http://westervillelibrary.org).

### COMPUTER CLASSES

Beginning computer classes offered for adults are listed. Registration is required.

Internet — 2 to 4 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 16.

E-mail: One on One — 2 to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 21.

Word — 2 to 4 p.m. Oct. 29 or 30.

Computers — 2 to 4 p.m. Nov. 4 or 6; 6 to 8 p.m. Nov. 5.

### SATURDAY TALES

Stories for the entire family are held from 11 to 11:30 a.m. Saturdays.

### MANGA AND ANIME CLUB

This group for teens will be screening *Fullmetal Alchemist* (episodes 4-6) from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Fridays, Oct. 17 and 31.

### MOVIES AT THE LIBRARY

Movies for children ages 6 and older, to be held from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturdays, include: *Nim's Island*, Oct. 18; and *Flicka*, Nov. 1.

Children of all ages are invited to watch *Peter Pan* at 7 p.m. Monday, Oct. 20; and *Spirited Away*, 3 to 5 p.m. Oct. 24 for ages 8 and older.

Bring snacks, pillows and blankets.

### PIZZA TASTE-OFF

To celebrate National Pizza Month teens are invited to guess where each pizza came from in a blind taste test from 3 to 4 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 18.



ARTS BRIEFS



OTTERBEIN COLLEGE THEATRE

The cast of *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, clockwise from top left: Matt Johnson, Cesar Villavicencio, Kolby Kindle, Trenton Weaver and Troy Burton

# Group honors Otterbein, Senior Repertory shows

*Smokey Joe's Cafe* from Otterbein College Theatre and *Tuesdays With Morrie* from Senior Repertory of Ohio Theatre Company were among the big winners during the weekend in the annual theater awards for central Ohio.

The Otterbein and Senior Rep shows shared top honors as the outstanding productions of 2008 — recognized by the Theatre Roundtable, a consortium of about two dozen theater companies in the area.



Randy Skinner

Choreographer and director Randy Skinner, a two-time Tony nominee who returned to Broadway this season with a holiday run of *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*, picked up the Roy Bowen Lifetime Achievement Award from the Central Ohio Theatre Critics Circle.

Little Theatre Off Broadway of Grove City, celebrating its 50th anniversary this season, received a critics' citation (and one of the previously announced Harold Awards) for setting an example "with its longevity, stability, year-

round programming and generations of volunteer support."

Other citations went to the Columbus Association for the Performing Arts and Contemporary American Theatre Company, for the Indian-Sri Lankan tour of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and Available Light Theatre, for its "pay-what-you-can" policy.

The awards were presented at the Jewish Community Center.

The Central Ohio Theatre Critics Circle includes reviewers from *The Other Paper*, Suburban News Publications, WOSU, *Alive!* and *The Dispatch*.

For a full report, visit the Theater Talk blog at [Dispatch.com/blogs](http://Dispatch.com/blogs).

## Lecture rescheduled

A lecture by Bryan Knicely on "State of the Arts of Columbus" has been rescheduled for 7:30 p.m. March 19 at Columbus School for Girls, 56 S. Columbia Ave., Bexley.

The sustaining board of the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus will present the talk by the Greater Columbus Arts Council president as part of its Mac Anderson lecture series.

Tickets cost \$20, with proceeds to benefit the orchestra. For more information, call 614-464-0066.

— From staff reports