

## CRAZY OVER 'CRAZY FOR YOU': Opera House's big song-and-dance show provides perfect escape into sheer entertainment

JUL 14 • ARTSY SMARTSY, FEATURE MAIN, THEATER • NO COMMENTS ON CRAZY OVER 'CRAZY FOR YOU': OPERA HOUSE'S BIG SONG-AND-DANCE SHOW PROVIDES PERFECT ESCAPE INTO SHEER ENTERTAINMENT

Going into their third show of the season, Opera House Theatre Company is highlighting the pop and classical standards of Gershwin brothers Ira and George, in the award-winning musical "Crazy for You." Running through July 26 at Thalian Hall, the show is loosely based on the 1930's Gershwin musical, "Girl Crazy," composed by George with lyrics written by Ira. The show was reimagined by a creative team, including Ken Ludwig, Mike Ockrent and Susan Stroman, who kept only a handful of the original numbers when it emerged as "Crazy for You" on Broadway in '92. It also was the last project approved by Ira's widow (Ira died in '83 and George in '37) before her death in 1991.





Courtney Poland and Christopher Rickert ham it up in 'Crazy for You.' Photo, courtesy of Opera House Theatre

The show follows a young Manhattanite, Bobby Child (Jason Aycock), whose primary dream in life is to dance for the Zangler Follies, which just wrapped its season at the Zangler Theatre on Broadway. Child becomes friends with all the Zangler showgirls, despite having made a not-so-good impression on Bella Zangler (Richard Bunting) himself. Child's mother has different ideas for her privileged son: She wants him to marry well and be a successful business man. She sends him off to foreclose on an old theatre the family bank owns in Deadrock, Nevada, where Child meets and falls head over hills in love with the town tomboy, Polly Baker (Kendra Goehring-Garrett). Only problem: Baker and her father own the theatre that Child's been sent to close. A host of characters show up to help Child put on a show to help save the theatre, in order for him to win the girl of his dreams. Farce and comedy ensue to leave the audience fully entrenched for two hours.

Quite simply: The storyline of "Crazy for You" basically exists to set up all of the large song-and-dance numbers across 15 scenes of this highly enjoyable show. What a job director/choreographer Ron Chisholm has done to fully captivate with this large cast of unstoppable talent! The obvious choice to cast local dancer Jason Aycock as the lead does not go unnoticed. Aycock has moves that challenge any dancer in town (after all, he did grow up as a pro-clogger and works for his family's dance business). Aycock's tap dancing astounds, as well as his chemistry with the showgirls in "I Can't Be Bothered Now" and "Nice Work if You Can Get It." His simpleton charm eschews the haughty upbringing his character should exude, making him lovable all the way through. His comedic chops shine greater when onstage with Bunting's Bella Zangler. Their doppelganger scene in "What Causes That?" may seem to garner easy laughs, but it also magnifies their talent as individuals and as peers.

Goehring-Garrett as Polly is a spitfire of action with an irresistible tell-it-like-it-is attitude. She absolutely steals every scene with her down-home lure—not to be mistaken with naiveté. When she sings "Someone to Watch Over Me," her vulnerability peeks through despite the tough-as-nails veneer she puts forth to the outside world. More so, audiences will be left agape at Goehring-Garrett's vocal reach. She's such a bright star on every stage, but she really shines when she gets to maximize all of her strengths: characterization, singing and dancing.

Though Aycock and Goehring-Garrett's chemistry is amiable, a volt of energy invigorates the show each time Courtney Poland and Christopher Rickert appear. Their electric—even if predictable—love awakens the laid-back mining town of Deadrock. Rickert as a hotheaded saloon/hotel owner puts him front and center at many misfortunes, often ones he incites. The frenzy is heightened yet

awakens the laid-back mining town of Deadrock. Rickert as a hotheaded saloon/hotel owner puts him front and center at many misfortunes, often ones he incites. The frenzy is heightened yet balanced by the beautifully adept Poland. Her beguiling appeal makes the number "Naughty Baby" one of my favorites of the night.

The ensemble in this production is as important as any main character. So many quips and one-liners happen because of their controlled chaos. Every "famous gunfight of the West" scene adds a jolt of fun to the show, loud shots fired and all. The men in Deadrock who enact these scenes—especially Brad Mercier (Junior), Sloan Friedman (Sam) and Bradley Barefoot (Moose)—truly are a hoot.

Of course, the Zangler Follies couldn't exist without the glitzy glamour and careful demure exuded by the showgirls. Standouts include Beth Swindell as Patsy, whose high-pitched voice accentuates her air-headed snippets of dialogue. Heather Setzler (Tess) grounds the talent as the leader of the showgirls, and she holds her own with every high kick and octave imaginable.

Without a doubt, "Slap That Bass" is the showgirls' standout scene. With standup bassist Emily Gittings onstage slapping the strings, each showgirl becomes a bass on her own. As they vertically stretch rope from head to toe, the men of Deadrock begin to "play" them. Its awe reminds me of the puppeteering scene in "Chicago" and garners deserved loud applause.

Every element of this show is eye and ear candy. Not only are the actors in tune with the characters they're playing and singing for, but the orchestra, led by Lorene Walsh, tickles every sense, thanks to George Gershwin's thoughtfully composed music. We not only hear every piano trickle and percussive pelt and knock, we see the sounds illuminated by every toe point and shimmy the actors dance. Their moves are punctuated by careful light design by Dallas LaFon, and their legs are dressed in the best, thanks to Debbie Sheu. Sheu has outdone herself with costumes indicative of the Depression era, from the dusty, Gingham prints and chaps and leather fringe of the West, to the sequins, fur and tailored suits of the Big Apple. And Terry Collins' set moves effortlessly from big city to Wild West without a hitch.

To put it best: I'm crazy over "Crazy for You." It hits every mark of escapism that sheer entertainment should do.

## **DETAILS:**

### **Crazy For You**

**Thalian Hall • 310 Chestnut Street**

**July 17-19, 24-26, 8 p.m.; Sunday matinees at 3 p.m.**

**Tickets: \$29**

[www.thalianhall.org](http://www.thalianhall.org)