

REVIEW**CRAZY FOR YOU***at the Downey Theatre*

Reviewed by Les Spindle

Crazy for You is billed as "the new Gershwin musical," but is that accurate? Depends on what you mean by "new." Ken Ludwig loosely based his book for this 1992 Broadway hit on the antiquated libretto for the 1930 George and Ira Gershwin musical *Girl Crazy*, and the patchwork score includes assorted tunes from *Girl Crazy*, as well as other Gershwin stage and film musicals. While the Broadway production scarcely brimmed with originality, it succeeded by virtue of stunning visuals, dazzling Susan Stroman choreography, and those evergreen Gershwin songs. In the Downey Civic Light Opera's uneven rendition, the creakiness of the vehicle is far more evident.

Director Ted Sprague and his co-choreographer Randy Hills achieve some show-stopping moments, most notably the "I Got Rhythm" first-act finale. But the show plods along awkwardly between the production numbers, as Sprague does little to counteract the meandering quality of Ludwig's hackneyed let's-put-on-a-show narrative. The songs are pasted into the story with all of the finesse of Elmer's Glue. Furthermore, Sprague includes bits of inane comic business that don't help (such as a woman who sprays spit every time she speaks). And an overlong pantomime bit with twins is too close for comfort to a famous *Duck Soup* sequence with Groucho and Harpo Marx.

A solid cast partially atones for these shortcomings. In the lead role of performer Bobby Child, Hills displays more prowess as an actor/dancer than as a singer, but he exudes charm and has a fine flair for physical comedy. The radiant and sweet-voiced Leanna Polk brings spunk and humor to the role of Bobby's on-again/off-again sweetheart Polly. Chris Sands is funny as an eccentric impresario, and Paul Hasenyager and Samantha Sanders score in second-banana turns.

With one vital exception, the physical design is superb. The rented sets are surprisingly tacky, which is not a minor liability in a show that cries out for pizzazz. The drab cartoon backdrops and unattractive set pieces simply don't cut it. The glitzy rented costumes are far more appropriate, and Steve Pliska has designed some dazzling lighting effects.

Hector Salazar's vibrant musical direction does full justice to the glorious score. Songs like "Someone To Watch Over Me," "But Not for Me," and "They Can't Take That Away From Me" make for some classic musical comedy moments. Yet this ragged production ultimately stops short of driving us to blissful insanity.

"Crazy for You," presented by Downey Civic Light Opera at the Downey Theatre, 8435 Firestone Blvd., Downey, Oct. 1-18. (562) 923-1714.