

'Crazy for You' combines fun, happy endings This 'happy, tappy, sappy' show is one of Riverside's best ever

By Barbara Yoresh
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This was an opening night at Riverside Theatre to remember.

I joined about 700 of my fellow audience members completely enthralled with the Gershwin musical "Crazy for You," which began its three-week run Jan. 13. Evident both on stage and in the house was an energy that could make Vero Beach's electric issues totally irrelevant.

If only this performance's power could be harnessed and sent through the wiring.

It's little wonder that the show - based on a 1930 musical - still enjoys such relevance and resonance now. A love story with classic songs, superb choreography, stunning costumes and entertaining characters has no expiration date.

I could not help but think that somewhere in thespian heaven Florenz Ziegfeld and Busby Berkeley were looking down with great pride and gratification, knowing that proper homage was still being given to the elaborate production numbers of their heydays.

The show's tap-dance sequences earned thunderous applause from a captivated audience, which literally hooted its approval.

Flawless debut

The production is possibly best described by Riverside Theatre's Marketing Director Oscar Sales, Jr., who said "Crazy for You" is a "happy, tappy, sappy show."

Classic songs, such as "I Got Rhythm," "Someone to Watch Over Me" and "They Can't Take That Away From Me," had more than a few in the crowd singing along.

One member of the audience - a Vero Beach resident who has spent his entire career in theater - declared it the best and most flawless opening-night performance he had seen in his entire life.

The magic of the evening was even more awe-inspiring given that the three-hour, high-energy musical was presented only 16 days after its first rehearsal, according to

Riverside Theatre producing artistic director Allen D. Cornell.

Uncommon core

Both the stars and the ensemble cast were, per-

haps, among the finest examples of "triple threats" in theater today. Oh, can they sing, dance and act.

Drew Nellesen, as Bobby Child, possesses a rare ability to perform

uncommonly difficult and strenuous dance sequences, as well as campy pratfalls worthy of the Marx

Brothers' or Three Stooges' goofiest "schticks."

He sings like a dream and his aptitude for physi-

cal comedy and facial contortions reminded

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me of a young Jim Carrey. I do believe his days as an ensemble cast member are over, though. He more than proved he has the stuff to play a difficult lead role.

This show has silly fun, poignancy, hope and happy endings. Yet through it all, one never forgets that the cast is obviously dealing with a very physically taxing show - it was apparent that Nellesen and other cast members were drenched in sweat.

And I did a double-take when a member of the dance corps donned metal-toed ballet slippers and did a tap number "en pointe." Unbelievable.

Everything combined

Abby Church, as Bobby's love interest Polly Baker, combined sass and sweetness in her flawless portrayal of the gritty Southwestern gal who would be softened by love. Her wistful "But Not for Me" finds a happy-ever-after ending with Bobby.

Love also breaks out among other, less likely couples including be-



PHOTO PROVIDED

'Crazy for You' is filled with top-knotch physical comedy and elaborate dance numbers.

tween Bobby's haughty mother - deliciously played by Eve Plumb, the former "Brady Bunch" daughter Jan - and Polly's father Everett (John O'Creagh).

The role of saloonkeeper Lank Hawkins is robustly performed by Tony Lawson, a veteran of many previous Riverside productions.

His character's chronic tendencies to loud sarcasm and indignation are screamingly funny, as are his pitiful attempts to win Polly's hand in marriage. Like others in the play, Lawson's role demands - and he attains - a high degree of physicality.

According to Sales, "The box office couldn't

keep up with the demand when we hadn't even opened yet. That says a lot about a show and this one has all the elements. It's everything combined and it has good bones."

Well, good bones aside, this show simply rocks with some of the best performances and dance sequences ever presented on Riverside's main stage. "Crazy for You" is an uncommonly happy, feel-good evening of theater.

"Crazy for You" will be performed through Feb. 1 at Riverside Theatre, 3250 Riverside Park Drive, Vero Beach.

For more information, call the box office at 772-231-6990.