

Center Stage presents “Guys and Dolls”

By Winkie Lee

News Argus Feature Editor

They weren't dancers when they began rehearsals, but now they're surprising their director. “The guys have shocked me,” says John Stutts, director of Center Stage Theatre's production of “Guys and Dolls.” “I'm amazed at what Ashley has done with these guys.”

Ashley is Ashley Barnes, the show's choreographer. She has worked on every musical Stutts has directed in Goldsboro.

“Guys and Dolls” has many songs and dances, but Stutts suspects what will most impress the audience is the selection that takes place in a sewer.

Yes, a sewer – one that has black lights.

Against a backdrop painted by Michael Ward, the men shoot dice, sing and dance as black lights produce some interesting looks.

It is often difficult to find enough men willing to sing and dance in musicals, but things worked out well this time.

“It seemed in the beginning that we were having trouble finding them,” Stutts says. But, thanks to word of mouth, “it worked out.”

Stutts also had the pleasant problem of having about five men who could have done well in the leading roles of Sky Masterson and Nathan Detroit. He finally decided that Bobby Boyd and Dr. Teague Horton would play the roles. But, which one would be which?

It was a tough decision, Stutts says.

He, his assistant director and technical director had the men read both characters' lines with lead actresses Lauren Grantham and Maria Starkweather.

Either pairing – Boyd with Ms. Grantham and Horton with Ms. Starkweather, or the other way around – would work.

“How do you decide?” he asks. “We sent the four of them out and we talked. It was a dilemma. It was such a toss-up that I just had to make a decision.”

Horton was awarded the role of Masterson and Boyd was cast as Detroit.

For Ms. Starkweather, landing the role of Miss Adelaide was a cherished accomplishment. She had “wanted to play this role for 10 years,” Stutts says.

The actress brings a “tiny taste of Edith Bunker and Marilyn Monroe” to the part, Stutts says, laughing. “Several characters are wrapped up in Adelaide.”

Ms. Grantham brings lessons she is learning as a student at Coastal Carolina University in Conway, S.C., where she is studying musical theater. She was cast because she is a very strong and versatile performer, Stutts says.

“Guys and Dolls” carries its audience to New York and introduces it to a variety of colorful characters. There is romance, comedy and music.

The book for “Guys and Dolls” is by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, music and lyrics are by Frank Loesser.

It is based on “The Idyll of Sarah Brown” and characters by Damon Runyon.

Stutts says it is one of his favorite shows, largely due to the music.

“It lends itself to creative choreography,” he says.

Adding to the color and style of the show is the set created by Miles Angelo, who also serves as technical director. The set features artwork by Michael Ward.

Angelo designed the set in the form of triangles built on hidden wheels. The triangles can be easily and quickly turned to reveal scene after scene.

Angelo smiles as he tells of coming up with the idea of designing the set in triangles, only to discover that many other theaters do the same thing.

Scene changes will be done by the cast members in front of the audience, Stutts says. In the scene with the Havana Club, dancers will dance the triangles onto the set.

The curtain will only close once.

“I think that will make the scenes go faster,” Stutts says.

“Guys and Dolls” is the first of four plays in Center Stage’s 2004-2005 season.

Among the cast members are: Chris Balance, Tamara Baltazar, Ashley Barnes, Bridget Behrens, Courtney Behrens, Michael Corbitt, Claire Dhayer, Craig Doubt, Jr., Sandra Evans and Anna Fisher.

Also, Landon Flemming, Meghann Flores, Ben Foster, Caroline Franco, Mike Garren, Ellen Ginn, Scott Grant, Lindsey Green, Haley Heller, R.J. Heller, Jessica Hochmuth, Dustin Holcombe and Kathleen Holcombe.

Rich Horton, Antony Kirby, Rachel Kreisle, Zack Laney, Bekah Logan, James McNally, Reynold Meraz, Cassidy Morris, Staci Morris, Shirley Mossburg, Betsy Overman, Dani Paynter and Tori Paynter.

Shirley Proctor, Zack Rayburn, Natasha Rimm, Brian Shoop, the Showstoppers 4-H Drama Club members, Debbie Shoop, Carl Teachey and Mark Whaley.

Among the crew members are: Susan Paynter, producer; Deanne Morris, assistant director; Cathy Stelly, stage manager; Sandra Evans, prop master; Bud Taracani, lighting operator; Joe Collins, sound operator; Holly Heller, music director, and Noelia Hamczyk, costumer.