

“Guys and Dolls”

Center Stage Theatre’s first production of the season will
be one to remember

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All you have to do is enter the lobby at the Paramount Theater and you get a glimpse into the time and effort that Center Stage Theatre has put into “Guys and Dolls,” its first production of the 2004-2005 season.

A large display has been put up that has a lighted marquee announcing the name of the play. Down its sides are strings of pink and green lights, as well as silhouettes of people.

By tonight, a pink curtain will have been placed behind the decoration to make it stand out even more.

It’s snazzy and eye-catching – just like Center Stage’s production.

It’s Wednesday night, and the cast and crew of the musical comedy are participating in a dress rehearsal – the last full rehearsal everyone will do together before opening night.

In Center Stage’s production, New York bursts to life with a vibrant look that includes an impressive backdrop the group has bought and a movable set designed by Miles Angelo. Later, cast members will turn the set’s large triangles to change from a storefront scene to other settings, such as a night club in Havana and a Salvation Army mission.

For now, a newspaper boy stands behind a newsstand placed in front of the storefront, adding another nice touch to the look. The music – a medley of songs from the play – begins and all types of people begin crossing the stage. A nun leads a line of young children. Two women scam an unsuspecting tourist. A couple look at the tall buildings of the city, mouths and eyes wide open. A boxer practices punches with his manager.

In “Guys and Dolls,” we meet a variety of characters, including a group of funny and likable gamblers. Michael Corbitt sings the play’s first song, bringing his beautiful voice and humor to the character of Nicely Nicely. His sidekicks, Rusty Charlie (Zack Rayburn) and Benny Southstreet (Mark Whaley), are also fun to watch.

In time we will meet the leads – two couples who go through the comedy and pain of being in love.

Already together as a couple are Nathan Detroit (Bobby Boyd), a gambler who loves his doll and his freedom, and Adelaide (Maria Starkweather), a dancer who, after 14 years of being engaged, wants to be married.

As they rehearse, Boyd and Ms. Starkweather give two incredibly strong performances.

“Guys and Dolls” includes wonderful group dances, including the “Crap Shooter’s Dance” and “Luck Be a Lady,” but one of the show’s strongest numbers is “Sue Me,” in which Ms. Starkweather belts out her laments as Boyd sings out his love.

Couple number two come together as the result of a bet. Sky Masterson (Teague Horton) has bet \$1,000 he can talk any woman into going to Havana with him. Detroit chooses Sarah Brown (Lauren Grantham), a Salvation Army officer who frequently goes onto the streets of New York to try to bring sinners to the Salvation Army's mission.

Masterson manages to get Ms. Brown to go with him, and she becomes drunk after having beverages she doesn't know contain alcohol. The scene shows off Horton's and Ms. Grantham's chemistry. They make one believe these very different people do care about each other.

"Guys and Dolls" has a cast that works well together. You can see the chemistry between individuals and groups.

It also has dazzling costumes.

And, on Wednesday night, as is often the case with dress rehearsals, it has a problem. The musicians originally scheduled to play have canceled. A band of four hearty souls have quickly come together and do their best to play the score, but no one can learn that much music that fast. It just doesn't work, and the play's leaders decide to use a CD for everything except the scene changes.

Director John Stutts, his cast and crew can feel good about this production. A lot of attention and care have been paid to it, and that shows.