

## Theatre Review: "The Music Man"

By Kevin M. O'Toole

Curiously, "The Music Man," the classic Tony Award winning musical by Meredith Willson that played to packed Broadway houses from 1957 to 1967 and has been revived around the country ever since, is about a flim-flam man. Its hero, Harold Hill, descends upon River City, Iowa, on July 2, 1912, with the intent to hoodwink the local rubes into paying for the instruments, uniforms and instruction books of a boys band that will never come to be. Oh, and along the way, he would not mind romancing a "sadder but wiser girl" who has been around the block a few times.

No matter. With heart-thumping marches such as "Seventy-Six Trombones," touching ballads such as "Good Night, My Someone" and big choral numbers performed by a large cast, Weston's opening night performance of its revival of "The Music Man" delivered pure entertainment from start to finish. It was terrific.

"The Music Man" hearkens back to a simpler time. Even then, however, change was in the air. As the traveling salesmen on the train in the show's wonderful opening number lament, pickle barrels were already a thing of the past and with the advent of the automobile, riding the circuit with wares might soon follow. Weston's production works in large part because we, along with Harold Hill, learn to care about the inhabitants of this small Midwestern town. In an interview, Director Malcolm Ewen noted that Meredith Willson had admonished future directors that the show was "intended to be a Valentine and not a caricature."

A veteran now of 45 productions at the Weston Playhouse, David Bonanno perfectly captured the smarmy, fast-talking Harold Hill, who somehow sows hope and joy instead of fear, and to his surprise, finds himself genuinely smitten with River City's chaste and suspicious librarian. It is a delicate transformation and Bonanno pulled it off. His rapid-fire rendition of "Trouble" invoked memories of Elmer Gantry, along with "Plymouth Rock and the Golden Rule."

As that very librarian, Marion, Marissa McGowan offered a clear-eyed interpretation of a woman who had known disappointment but recognized that Harold Hill, warts and all, just might be the white knight for whom she had been pining. McGowan's clear, soaring soprano voice, particularly in "Good Night, My Someone," was just lovely. In reviewing McGowan's performance in another Weston production for this newspaper last season, I wrote that "I did not want her to stop singing." I still don't.

Space limitations do not permit me to mention everyone in the cast of 27, mostly familiar faces on the Weston stage, members of Weston's Young Company and a complement of local and regional talent. Even so, Allen Kendall, Daniel Leonard, Roger Seyer and Gideon Chickos were delightful as the bickering members of the River City School Board who find harmony as a barbershop quartet, crooning "Sincere" and "Lida Rose."

Also, Munson Hicks and Dorothy Stanley, who played the curmudgeonly Mayor Shin and his easily swayed spouse, Eulalie, were hilarious. All of the youngsters onstage (actually, the "boys band" had a lot of girls), especially Margo Potter and Sander Scott as Marion's piano student, Amaryllis, and Marion's much younger brother, Winthrop, were great. Kudos to Music Director Larry Pressgrove as well as to Choreographer Michael Raine, who employed a nimble cast to no end with polkas, jigs and leaps and bounds.

Leaving the Playhouse, acquaintances from Manchester caught me skipping down the path to my car, singing "Seventy-Six Trombones" with gusto. And why not?

Performances of "The Music Man" continue at the Weston Playhouse through August 19. For ticket information, call the WPTC box office at [\(802\) 824-5288](tel:8028245288) or visit its website at [www.westonplayhouse.org](http://www.westonplayhouse.org).