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'The Sound of Music'

Camelot production will be a pleasure the whole family can appreciate

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By Roberta Kent

Tidings reviewer
Posted: 2:00 AM March 21, 2013

Inspiring music, an upbeat story and sweet precocious children — what's not to like about Camelot Theatre Company's production of "The Sound of Music," the ever-popular and multiple award-winning musical with book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, music by Richard Rodgers and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II?

No edgy characters or complicated plot, no discordant notes here. All it takes to make everything right with the world is music, music, music.

"The Sound of Music" tells the tale of an exuberant postulate nun, Maria, sent from an Austrian abbey to be a governess to the seven children of a rigid retired naval captain. Of course, we soon learn that Captain Georg von Trapp's stuffy demeanor is the result of the death of his wife. Once Maria's joie de vivre and nonstop music come into the von Trapps' family life, the children are happy and well-behaved and the Captain becomes warm and loving — positively cuddly. When Nazi Germany takes over Austria, the Captain refuses to kowtow to the new repressive regime and the family must flee over their beloved mountains to safety.

What holds this story together, what takes it beyond the sweet and sentimental, is the glorious music of Rodgers and Hammerstein. From the nuns' Latin chants through towering melodies like "The Sound of Music" and "Climb Every Mountain," down to deceptively simple melodies like "Do-Re-Mi," "My Favorite Things" or "Edelweiss," it's the music that defines Maria's emotional journey and the story's ultimate optimism.

Director Roy Von Rains, Jr. has assembled a vocally talented cast. Rose Passione is an expressive and spunky Maria without being cloying or saccharine. Don Matthews gives the Captain dignity in his confrontations with the Nazis as well as the needed warmth and depth in his exchanges with the children. Kris Wildman, as the Mother Abbess, has a voice that soars in "Climb Every Mountain" and a refreshing twinkle in her eye in her lighter duets with Maria. Camelot's Artistic Director Livia Genise gives the Captain's fiancée, Elsa Schraeder some depth — this Elsa really cares for him but it becomes clear that his uncompromising nature and the prospect of "mothering" seven children are not her idea of a match. Mark B. Ropers provides some sly humor as the music promoter, Max Detweiler, willing to be as flexible with political realities as he is with booking problems.

The seven von Trapp children are played by Julia Holden-Hunkins, Karl Moeglein, Lauren Green, Preston Mead, Holly Ragsdale, Annika Larson and Jordon Trunnell. In a real acting (and directing) feat, they are actually individually distinguishable rather than being simply a cute backup group for Maria. Holden-Hunkins is especially fetching in her budding romance duet, "Sixteen Going on Seventeen," with the proto-Nazi telegraph messenger Rolf, earnestly played by Zaq Wentworth.

The Camelot production of "The Sound of Music" uses script and music from the original play that opened on Broadway in 1959. Unlike the 1965 film with Julie Andrews, the play is a bit kinder to Captain von Trapp's rich fiancée and a gives the Captain's friend, Detweiler, a bit more bite. There are also a couple of rather sardonic songs that weren't in the film, "How Can Love Survive?" and "No Way to Stop It," as well as a sweet love duet between Maria and the Captain, "An Ordinary Couple." (With all that beautiful Austrian scenery to cover, perhaps the movie didn't want to waste time with deeper character development?)

All but two of the children's and young adult roles are played by graduates of Camelot's Conservatory Program and it's nice that they have a chance to show off their talents in the regular season.

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Rains also co-designed the simple and effective set with Don Zastoupil. The abbey scenes take place in front of the proscenium curtain with the Captain's house defined onstage by stairs, terraces and some minimal props. Costume designers Erin Elstrom and Blue Glass do nice things with matching dirndls, nuns' habits and even some ball gowns.

Music director Mark Reppert manages to re-create a big orchestra sound with a six-person band hidden offstage.

"The Sound of Music" is the kind of show you can take your kids to — or your mom or a visiting aunt. You can also enjoy it just going on your own. After all, wouldn't it be nice if all our problems could be solved by just spontaneously bursting into song?

"The Sound of Music" is at Camelot Theatre through April 14. Evening performances Wednesday through Saturday are at 8 p.m. with Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. Tickets can be purchased in person, by phone at 541-535-5250 or online at www.CamelotTheatre.org.

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