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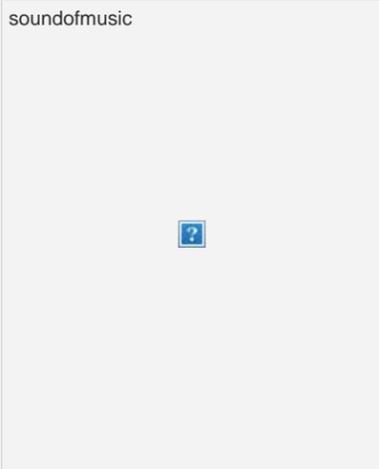
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**"The Sound of Music" – Classic Still a Charmer at Camelot Theatre Company**

BY ROSEY – MARCH 17, 2013  
 POSTED IN: ROSEY'S PLAY REVIEWS



There's a lot to like about this production. And like it I did. Very much.

Thank God for that. Because not only is "The Sound of Music" a classic in the best sense, with a storyline and songs held dear a half-century after its Broadway opening, this play, for good reason, is revered as a holy icon. Any negative comments by a reviewer might well be received as nothing short of blasphemy.

So I'll say it again: Thank heaven that director Roy Von Rains, Jr., the cast and crew and the fine off-stage six-piece orchestra did justice to Rogers and Hammerstein's music and the book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse.

Set in Austria in the tense days before the occupation and annexation by Nazi Germany, the story is about the real-life wealthy von Trapp family. The patriarch, Georg (Don Matthews), whose heart was hardened when he became a

widower, hires Maria (Rose Passione), a nun in training, as a governess for his seven children. The household, run with military discipline and precision, and not much fun, is overturned by the effervescent Maria who dispenses love while developing the children's world-class musical talents. Meanwhile, even as Georg courts Elsa Schraeder (Livia Genise) as a potential mother for his kids, he finds himself susceptible to Maria's charms. (Needing to come off as less lovable and less authentic than Maria, Elsa is a particularly challenging role; Genise does what is necessary with polish and finesse.)

Matthews and Passione clearly have the stage presence, training and theatrical sophistication to carry out their demanding roles. And while a felt sense of chemistry between them was somewhat lacking, the couple compensated well with the sincerity of their performances, their genuine likeability, mutual admiration, and well-matched voices. Passione managed to mine the depths—and doubts—of Maria's heart.

As written, it is the children's role in this play to hold its center and maintain its spirit with unflagging energy, humor and true innocence even as they tug (but not too hard) on the audience's heartstrings. Being adorable can't be enough; they're simply on stage too much. And that's a lot to ask for any group of young amateur performers. It's a credit to them and to the Camelot company that these children pull it off. And they sing well enough ensemble to make a convincing case as the celebrated Trapp family.

Julia Holden-Hunkins as the "sixteen-going-on-seventeen"-year-old daughter Liesl personifies the cusp of womanhood with a mature and nuanced performance for an actress of any age. Revealing character beneath her pretty smile, she and Passione's scenes are credible and moving.

As Kurt, one of the middle children, Preston Mead takes full advantage of a role that provides ample opportunity to be playful; he is incorrigibly cute, clownish and delightful. The kid's a natural, someone I'd enjoy seeing again.

In very much the same way, Mark B. Ropers rises to his role, injecting a most-likeable childish quality and good humor into Max Detweiler, the amoral, apolitical music booker of the Saltzberg Festival.

The ultra-minimalist set for the Saltzberg abbey where we first meet Maria among the nuns—it's just bare stage in front of the dark curtain—is a good choice, reflecting the order's devotion to unadorned simplicity while providing a stark contrast to the colorful character of the wise Mother Abbess, played with conviction and a twinkle by Kris Wildman. Her mezzo-soprano Kate-Smith-size power voice was perfect to handle the inspirational "Climb Every Mountain."

The set pieces behind the curtain—the Von Trapp gardens and, at one time, Maria's bedroom—made excellent use of the rear projection screen to warm the stage and match the mood from a rich color palette.

"The Sound of Music" is scheduled to play through April 15, though if advance ticket sales are any indication, I can imagine that the run might need to be extended.

As a Realtor associated with Cascade Sothebys in Ashland and Southern Oregon, I want to thank you in advance for your business and your referrals. What could be better than working with someone who shares your love of theatre? Call me at 541-778-8949.

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Cascade Sotheby's INTERNATIONAL REALTY  
 Alan "Rosey" Rosenberg Broker  
 325 A St. - Suite 3  
 Ashland, OR 97520  
 541.778.8949  
 alan.rosenberg@cascaदेशsothebysrealty.com

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