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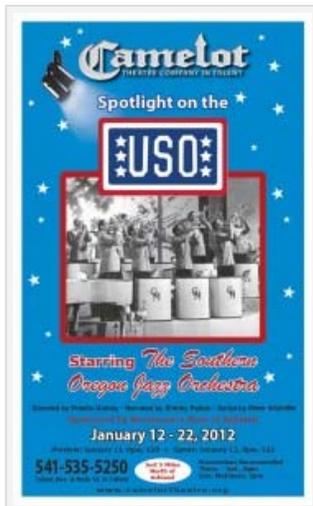
CAMELOT THEATRE COMPANY

ASHLAND CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

"Spotlight on the USO" – A Big Bravo for the Brass at Camelot Theatre Company

BY ROSEY – JANUARY 16, 2012

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Let me get this out of the way up front. A simple unthemed concert by the tight and terrific 15-piece Southern Oregon Jazz Orchestra would have left me toe-tapping happy and genuinely satisfied.

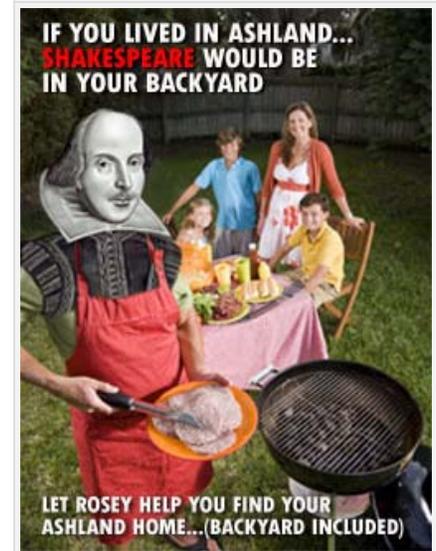
That said, as a hook on which to "hang" this concert, the USO (United Service Organizations), which has provided entertainment and escape for servicemen and women overseas since World War Two, served as a perfect pretext; artistic Director Livia Genise and her staff chose well.

The smooth and bright, brassy big-band sound rang out with period authenticity, while the tag team of vocalists, Diane Strong and Alan Berman did far more than merely arouse a stirring of nostalgia. Berman's understated and velvety crooner's style conjured Bennett and Sinatra. His rendition of the Sammy Cahn number "Call Me Irresponsible" was spot-on. And Strong's silky, spirited and soulful sensuality could be as big and brassy as the band she fronted.

Shirley Patton, one of the company's most solid actresses, assumed the duties of narrator. Standing beside a console radio circa 1940, she demurely and elegantly delivered an often-poignant and well-

documented script by Peter Wickliffe that chronicled the history of the organization.

Through no fault of director Presila Quinby, who ably illustrated the history with a lush color palette and pitch-perfect projected photos and newsreels—many featuring Bob Hope—the charm of the narrative wore thin in a second act in which the storyline itself was understandably thinner. By then, the USO's patriotic purpose was playing out through our country's ensuing—and less popular—wars. Even as I thrummed my fingers on my knee to the pre-Vietnam-era "Rock Around the Clock," I found myself pained by the truth that



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the organization's mission continues on the battlefields of Afghanistan.

As with all the other "spotlights" at the Camelot, this most excellent and entertaining show—it kicks off a presidential election year theme of patriotism and politics—has far too brief a run. See it in Talent through Jan. 22.

(For this review, I credit my playgoing partner Clista Prella-Tworek for her insights and artist's perspective. Please see one example of her work below and find more on her website: <http://www.clistaspastels.com/>

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"Egypt" by Clista Prella-Tworek

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