

# Musical is rainin' talent

Who in the heck does Claudia Lively think she is, anyway? Not only does the gifted Fairbanks actress agree to take on the role of director for the ambitious Fairbanks Light Opera Theatre/Theatre UAF production of "Singin' in the Rain," she also immerses herself in the production as choreographer, costume designer and constructor, set designer and program designer. All of this might be fine and dandy if we were talking about a tiny little production, but "Singin'" is far from tiny, containing more than 400 costumes and numerous set changes, including one set that features actual rain.

"Singin' in the Rain" is a triumph in local musical theater, featuring plenty of eye and ear candy for the whole family. You can chalk up that success to numerous reasons, including the talented cast and the equally talented folks sweating it out behind the scenes, but proper credit must go to the person in charge: Lively, the show's Jill-of-all-trades.

Now about the cast ... I hear that 18-year-old David Gregory, who plays Cosmo Brown, is leaving Fairbanks this summer to go to college. I encourage the rest of the town to assist me in setting up roadblocks and canceling flights. Gregory is a versatile per-



Scott  
McCrea

## Theater Review

former, who has easily mastered the theatrical triple-threat of acting, singing and dancing. His sense of comedic timing and the eye-popping dexterity and finesse he exhibits in his dance numbers are remarkable for a young man his age. His leaving Fairbanks will be a loss to the Golden Heart City but a definite gain for Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio.

Also holding his own in the triple-threat arena is C. Johan Brun, who plays the leading role of Don Lockwood. Brun takes on a role that was made legendary by Gene Kelly and acts in a scene that is considered to be among the best in the history of the cinema. Would you want that responsibility? Apparently Brun did, and I appreciate that he didn't try to "Kelly it up" by imitating the late actor. Instead he made the role his own. Another impressive factor of Brun's performance is that while Gregory had a background in tap dancing

going into the show, it was a new skill for Brun. If this hadn't been mentioned in the publicity leading up to the show, I wouldn't have noticed.

Leading lady Kathy Seldon is played by Rebekah Vanderlugt. She has a sweet voice and chemistry with her fellow leads. One of the finest ensemble numbers is "Good Morning," which features Seldon, Brun, and Gregory. The interaction is a pleasure to watch.

Other standouts include Christina Welch as the squeaky Lina Lamont, Terry McCarthy as studio mogul R.F. Simpson and Marcia Holt as the exasperated director, Roselyn Dexter.

Lively and Kade Mendelowitz, Theatre UAF associate professor, do an outstanding job as the show's set designers; some sets are drop-dead gorgeous and remarkably authentic to the era. The scene changes are virtually seamless. "Dead air" between scenes often hampers elaborate productions, but this was not the case with "Singin' in the Rain." Mendelowitz and his student team even manage to create an amazing puddle-stompin' rain set for the show's title number.

FLOT productions are well-known for their beautiful costumes. After seeing enough shows, particularly ones set in a similar time frame, you begin to

recognize costumes that had been used in previous productions. The costumes used in "Singin' in the Rain" (which, in true FLOT fashion, were great as always) all appeared to be originals. And with the large cast and numerous scene changes, creating that many gorgeous costumes had to be quite a feat.

There are many other treasures such as the black-and-white movies shown during the play, the slide show-style introduction of the cast, an extremely talented orchestra led by Kevin Brown and a cleverly designed program.

The joining of FLOT and Theatre UAF for this production makes for one heck of a marriage. It's exciting to see a sort of "town and gown" collaboration that employs the diverse talents our community has to offer. While there might be plenty of rain coming down on the stage of the Lee Salisbury Theatre, thanks to the show's talented performers, there is plenty of sun shining as well.

"Singin' in the Rain" runs for the next two weekends, with performances Friday and Saturday night at 8 and Sunday afternoon at 4. For more information, call 456-FLOT.

Scott McCrea is a local free-lance writer who has reviewed local theater for several years.

"Don't miss "Singin' in the Rain." The show, a co-production of the Fairbanks Light Opera Theatre and Theatre UAF, is strong from start to finish. The costumes, music, lighting and dancing are wonderful.

The set in which it actually "rains" on the stage is an outstanding piece of stagecraft. The show continues for the next two weekends."

Dermot Cole

Fairbanks Daily News-Miner Columnist

March 23, 2004

Dermot Cole  
Daily Columnist

