

All the Right Notes

When Jerome Kern said, "Irving Berlin has no place in American music. He is American music," he wasn't kidding. *I Love a Piano*, a musical revue by Michael Berkeley and Ray Roderick, now running at the Wagon Wheel Theatre, features 64 of Berlin's songs. Only a few of these songs were unfamiliar to my husband - and he's not the musical theatre aficionado that I am. But even the songs we weren't familiar with sounded fresh and contemporary.

The through line of the show centers on a 1910-built piano. Similar to the titular instrument in the film *The Red Violin*, this steadfast little wooden upright moves along through American history going from owner to owner.

Although they aren't necessarily presented in the decades in which they were written, the songs do fit together well in a series of vignettes, some hilarious, others heartbreaking. Backed by a slide show featuring vintage photos, the production captures the fast-changing styles and moods experienced by Americans from 1910 through the late 1950s.

The first vignette illustrates the early practice of selling sheet music in stores by having pretty people sing to customers - kind of an interactive 1910 version of iTunes. The costume change from the long dresses and updos of the 1910s to the short fringed flapper dresses and bobbed wigs of the '20s really bring home the changes in American attitudes that occurred within 10 short years. World War II, dance marathons and the Great Depression are also represented by Berlin's songs, which reflected the American psyche during the first part of the 20th century.

But this show isn't a history lesson (not that there's anything wrong with that).

The six performers are paired up throughout the show, and the chemistry between the performers is tangible. Kira Lace Hawkins and David Schlumpf have a genuine sensuousness in all their scenes. Jennifer Dow and Stephen Anthony bring sophistication and wit to their pairings. Dan Smith and Hillary Smith are the adorable "juvenile leads" but they have moments of tenderness as well.

Act 1 features the least-known songs but still has dozens of familiar tunes. Anyone who's seen a Fred Astaire movie will



Curtain Call

JEN POIRY-PROUGH

I LOVE A PIANO
Thursday, Aug. 23 • 2 & 8 p.m.
Friday-Saturday, July 24-25
8 p.m.
Wagon Wheel Theatre
2517 E. Center St., Warsaw
Tix.: \$31, 574-267-8041

recognize most of the numbers in scene 5, set in a movie theatre. The act ends with a World War II-era Stage Door Canteen show. Hillary Smith's "What'll I Do?" broke the audience's heart and Hawkins' "God Bless America" brought them to their feet (literally). It was a unique moment of theatre magic.

Act 2 opens with the end of the war, and includes several funny numbers, but Hawkins' rendition of "Supper Time" brings back the tragedy of war.

Schlumpf, Anthony and Dow display perfect comic timing during the song "Lazy," as they play kazoo while taking a break from moving the ever-present piano.

Some of the most familiar songs might be from the "Summer Stock Theater" section which features songs from *Annie Get Your Gun*. The premise of the scene is that three actresses of various ages are auditioning for the lead, and their competitiveness while singing "Anything You Can Do" is absolutely hilarious. This scene culminates with two counterpoint songs ("You're Just In Love" and "Old Fashioned Wedding") being sung individually and then together. Four singers singing four different things, beautifully.

When the cast sings together, their voices blend beautifully in tight harmonies. The production features the most simple, no-frills set this season, leaving more room for the dancing, choreographed by Scott Michaels, who also directed. The dance numbers are energetic and give the illusion of a much larger chorus. The seemingly endless array of costumes, designed by Stephen R. Hollenbeck, are stunning.

I've never been a particular fan of the musical revue genre, but *I Love a Piano* completely won me over. Its stories of everyday Americans are beautifully told and well-acted, resulting in an emotionally satisfying way to end the Wagon Wheel season.
jen@greenroomonline.org

Now Playing

THE HALF-STITCHED AMISH QUILTING CLUB — Story of a mismatched lot who join together for a quilting class, by award-winning, bestselling author Wanda E. Brunstetter (call for times) Aug. 24-Dec. 8 at Blue Gate Theater, Shipshewana, \$29-\$44, www.riegsecker.comphtheater

HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY — A classic country musical biography of the legendary singer (call for times) Wednesday-Sunday thru Aug. 26, at the Round Barn Theatre at Amish Acres, Nappanee, \$6.95-\$45.16, 800-800-4942, www.amishacres.com

HARRY POTTER AND THE OBNOXIOUS VOICE — Ecstatic Theatrics presentation of a parody play spoofing the boy wizard and written by local playwright Jeannette Jaquish 7 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Aug. 24-25 at west side of Franke Park, Fort Wayne, free, 484-5946, www.ecstatictheatrics.com

I LOVE A PIANO-AN IRVING BERLIN REVIEW — Salute to the American songwriter that includes a large song-catalog revue of his work 8 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 23; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Aug. 24-25 at Wagon Wheel Theatre, Warsaw, \$12-\$31, 574-267-8041, wagonwheeltheatre.org

PLAIN AND FANCY — A musical comedy at the Round Barn Theatre (call for times) thru Oct. 20 at Amish Acres, Nappanee, \$6.95-\$45.16, 800-800-4942, www.amishacres.com

Asides

AUDITIONS

ADVENTURES OF HUCK FINN (Oct. 5-8) — Auditions for Fort Wayne Youththeatre production 4-6 p.m. Tuesday-Wednesday, Sept. 4-5 at Arts United Center, Fort Wayne, 422-6900, www.fortwayneyouththeatre.org

A CHRISTMAS SURVIVAL GUIDE (Nov. 23-Dec. 15) — Auditions for holiday musical revue 7 p.m. Sunday-Monday, Sept. 30-Oct. 1 at Arena Dinner Theatre, Fort Wayne, 424-5622, www.arenadinnertheatre.org

THE SNOW QUEEN (Dec. 14-16) — Auditions for Fort Wayne Youththeatre production 4-6 p.m. Tuesday-Wednesday, Nov. 6-7 at Arts United Center, Fort Wayne, 422-6900, www.fortwayneyouththeatre.org

Planning Calendar

SEPTEMBER

SISTERS OF SWING: THE STORY OF THE ANDREWS SISTERS — National touring musical that follows the early days of the hit-making trio (call for times) Sept. 4-Oct. 14 at the Round Barn Theatre at Amish Acres, Nappanee, \$6.95-\$45.16, 800-800-4942, www.amishacres.com

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Calendar • Stage & Dance

GOD OF CARNAGE — First Presbyterian Theater presents this R-rated examination that devolves into a dark comedy of bad manners where it's hard to tell the children from the adults 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Sept. 6-8, Friday-Saturday, Sept. 14-15 and 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 16; 10:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 21 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 22 at First Presbyterian Theater, Fort Wayne, full-time students w/ID free, \$10-\$24, 422-6329, www.firstpresbyteriantheater.com

A FEW GOOD MEN — Fort Wayne Civic Theatre presents Aaron Sorkin's drama about a young Navy lawyer involved in a trial of a U.S. Marine 8 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 8; 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 9; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Sept. 14-15; and 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 16 at Arts United Center, Fort Wayne, \$16-\$24, 424-5220, www.fwcivic.org

CARMINA BURANA — Collaborative production from the Fort Wayne Ballet, Heartland Sings and the Fort Wayne Children's Choir that offers 24 medieval poems set to Carl Orff's musical composition 8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 21 and 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 23 at Arts United Center, Fort Wayne, \$27-\$23 adv., \$32-\$27 d.o.s., 422-4226, www.artsunited.org

A PECULIAR PEOPLE — The identification of Christians in 1 Peter 2:9 is examined in this All for One Productions presentation 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Sept. 21-22; 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 23 at Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, \$8-\$12 adv., \$10-\$15 d.o.s., 622-4610, www.allforonefw.org

ANNIE — Wabash Area Community Theater presentation of Tony-winning musical about Depression-era orphan 7:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Sept. 28-29 and 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 30 at Honeywell Center, Wabash, \$11-\$16, 563-1102, www.honeywellcenter.org

BUSYBODY — British playwright and songwriter Jack Poppelwell's comic murder mystery 7 p.m. dinner, 8 p.m. curtain, Friday-Saturday, Sept. 28-29, Oct. 5-6 and Oct. 12-13 at Arena Dinner Theatre, Fort Wayne, \$35, 424-5622, www.arenadinnertheatre.org

THE MISER — Moliere's 17th-century comic masterpiece updated and presented by IPFW Theatre department 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Sept. 28-29 and Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 4-6 and 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7 at Williams Theatre, IPFW, Fort Wayne, \$5-\$14, IPFW students w/ID free, 481-6555, new.ipfw.edu/theatre

OCTOBER

THE FIREBIRD — Ivan and the Firebird join forces to thwart the king's magic in this Fort Wayne Ballet Youth Company Family Series production 10 a.m. & 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 6 at Auer Center for Arts and Culture, Fort Wayne, \$10, 422-4226, www.fortwayneballet.org

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ANGELINA BALLERINA THE MUSICAL — PBS children's show comes to the stage in song and dance 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 6 at Honeywell Center, Wabash, \$9-\$14, 563-1102, www.honeywellcenter.org

SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS — First Presbyterian Theater presentation of a man thought to be dead showing up to claim his fiancée that sets off all kinds of silliness 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Oct. 11-13 and Friday-Saturday, Oct. 19-20; 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 21; and 7:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Oct. 26-27 at First Presbyterian Theater, Fort Wayne, \$10-\$24, 422-6329, www.firstpresbyteriantheater.com

NUNSET BOULEVARD — Cindy Williams of TV's *Laverne & Shirley* stars in this tale of the Little Sisters of Hoboken 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14 at Niswonger Performing Arts Center, Van Wert, \$17-\$37, 419-238-6722, www.npacvw.org

DRIVING MISS DAISY — National road tour of Broadway incarnation of the Oscar-winning film (call for times) Oct. 17-Nov. 4 at the Round Barn Theatre at Amish Acres, Nappanee, \$6.95-\$45.16, 800-800-4942, www.amishacres.com

DISNEY'S PHINEAS AND FERB LIVE — Phineas, Ferb and the Tri-State gang escape from the TV to go onstage 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Friday, Oct. 26 at Allen County War Memorial Coliseum, \$15.50-\$47.50, 482-9502, disneygo.com/disneylive/phineas-and-ferb-on-tour

SAVION GLOVER'S SOLE SANCTUARY — Award-winner tap dancer/choreographer performs 7:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 26 at Honeywell Center, Wabash, \$25-\$45, 563-1102, www.honeywellcenter.org

NOVEMBER

AN O. HENRY CHRISTMAS — All for One Productions presents a rags-to-riches Christmas story in the tradition of author O. Henry 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Nov. 2-3; 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 4; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Nov. 9-10; 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 11 at Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, \$8-\$12 adv., \$10-\$15 d.o.s., 622-4610, www.allforonefw.org

IMAGINOCEAN — Black-light puppet show that presents an undersea adventure 1 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 3 at Niswonger Performing Arts Center, Van Wert, \$12-\$22, 419-238-6722, www.npacvw.org

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