

WHITE CHRISTMAS

Music and Lyrics by Irving Berlin

The Virginia Musical Theatre

Sandler Center for the Performing Arts

Nov. 29 - Dec. 2, 2007

Times and Tickets call: (757) 340.5446

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large

The Virginia Musical Theater has been reborn! It has become an almost fully professional company with about half of the cast of "White Christmas" being members of the professional actors' union. After seventeen years of struggling to produce big Broadway musicals on a shoe string, with primarily local talent, it now has a budget of 1.5 million dollars. It has a new home at the glitzy Sandler which is located smack dab in the middle of Virginia Beach's beautiful, exciting, Disney-like Towne Center. Warmest congratulations and good wishes to producer Jeff Meredith and Managing Director Mark Hudgins for their remarkable accomplishments..

Producer Meredith has wisely invested a good portion of his budget in talented performer. And, he has engaged a Broadway veteran dancer, director and choreographer, Ann Nieman, to whip them into shape. The result is a slick, fast moving, musical romp that soars at times with flashy show stopping production numbers, to such Berlin favorites as "Blue Skies" and "I love a Piano",

It's fortunate that Nieman was given an attractive lot of boys and girls who can who can tap dance, sing and do about anything else demanded of them. They back up two outstanding and delightful song and dance men, Allen Snyder and Jody Maderas, who we see begin their show biz careers in 1944 on Christmas Eve on the European front. They continue as a team when discharged from the army and end up at an ill-fated inn owned by their former general. Along the way, they meet and fall in love with a sister act of two canaries performed by Amanda Johnson and Kelly Shook.

It's time to point out that this is a musical based on a movie, Two movies in fact that had stars like Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye and Fred Astaire. High powered actors like these can make feeble writing work. This company does pretty well with the creaky, rambling book that has little humor and serves only as a frame work to weave together the Berlin tunes. You may find your mind wandering, as you wait for the next song, in spite of the good work by Nieman and company.

Amanda Johnson is a lovely singer whose torch song rendition of "How Deep is the Ocean" was swamped by the generally good orchestra conducted by Andrew Austin. It may be that her microphone failed. There were many, many sound glitches at the matinee I saw. These will be corrected I'm sure after this shake down cruise. A little tweaking is in order for Brenda Veltre's lighting as

well that seems a bit blotchy with dark holes.. Brandon R. McWilliams costumes range from being imaginative to adequate. Jason Bolen's set designs would benefit from a good painter to execute them.

All in all this is an auspicious beginning for the Phoenix like Virginia Musical Theatre. May their future days be merry and bright.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.