

THOMAS MORRISSEY

Producer / Director / Choreographer

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Reviews

Entertainment Fort Worth Star-Telegram

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KICKING IT UP A NOTCH

'Gypsy' proves theater's new staff has what it takes

By Mark Lowry

Star-Telegram Staff Writer

GRANBURY - It's officially time to squelch the rumor around town about whether the new, large staff of Texas Star Theatre -- the producing organization at the Granbury Opera House -- has what it takes to bring the artistic level up a notch. Make that several lengths.

The answer is most definitely, as witnessed by its first full production, the Laurents/Styne/Sondheim musical masterpiece *Gypsy*. It's clear that TST's leader, Thomas Morrissey, is a man with the vision that goes beyond simply staging a show. He puts his stamp on it, making a compelling case for its revival.

Gypsy is the ultimate showbiz fable, and Morrissey's portrait of that world ain't pretty. The bare brick backstage wall is always visible, as is the artifice of it all, from the clever device of using onstage performers to scroll a background landscape behind Rose's car, to exposing the "Act 2, Scene 5" marker on the rolling set of Louise's posh dressing room.

Morrissey's biggest coup, though, is bringing in New York/L.A. actor Cindy Benson to portray Rose, the infamous stage mother who refuses to believe that vaudeville is dead. Hers is a different Rose than the Ethel Merman/Rosalind Russell mold some might consider definitive.

Benson's version is best summed up in her reply to Herbie (Michael Kostroff), when he asks whether her act is any good. "It's great," she says, not as a reactive affirmation, but with the kind of confidence that comes with a hint of doubt. Benson doesn't rush and yell about the stage, as other Roses would. She's still tyrannical to a degree, as Rose must be, but in a more driven way. She's a hard worker who honestly wants the best for her daughters. She also has the vocal chops: Her *Rose's Turn* finale is emotionally breathtaking.

There are many other fine turns, including Kostroff and a very natural Brittany Bailey as grown-up Louise. Ashton Smalling's Baby June is so good it's frightening (she alternates that role with Kathryn Priest). And there's a priceless trio of washed-up burlesque performers in Pam Pendleton, Allison Heyman and Marissa Rosen.

Gypsy marks an important transition for Granbury.

Gypsy

- Through July 24; 2 and 8 p.m. Thursdays and Saturdays, 8 p.m. Fridays, 2 p.m. Sundays
- Texas Star Theatre at the Granbury Opera House, 133 E. Pearl St., Granbury

Texas Star Theatre presents GYPSY



STAR-TELEGRAM/JOYCE MARSHALL

Cindy Benson stars as Rose in Texas Star Theatre's first full production, *Gypsy*.

- \$10-\$36
- (866) 572-0881
- www.texasstartheatre.org

GRADE: A-



At top, Jennifer Matthews plays June, and Brittany Bailey, rear, is Louise. The production runs through July 24.

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HOOD COUNTY NEWS

GYPSY

Theatre Review

'Gypsy' takes theater to new level of professionalism

by **STAN WEINBERG**
Staff Writer

Wow!!!!

That's what I said to my wife Friday night when the curtain came down on the opening of *'Gypsy'* at Texas Star Theatre at the Historic Granbury Opera House.

I've seen many productions at that theater, but *'Gypsy'* was one of the most energetic and professional performances I've witnessed.

Other members of the packed audience appeared to appreciate the outstanding performance.

'Gypsy' is first show under the new management team, and director Tom Morrissey had a lot riding on how it would be received. If Friday night was any example, the performance could be declared a hit.

Broadway actress Cindy Benson, who plays Mama Rose, earned every dollar director Morrissey paid her to come to Granbury.

Benson is a powerful entertainer. She acts, sings and dances with a level of energy that dominates the

stage and engages the audience.

She was entirely believable as the overbearing, relentless and indefatigable stage mother who is determined to make stars of her two daughters.

'Gypsy' opens with 'Baby Louise' and her sister 'Baby June' as young girls in a rather hokey vaudeville act. They are in a show with a bunch of other talented and semi-talented kids.

The opening musical number with a kids' ensemble will knock you out. The kids never miss a beat in their singing or dancing. They are a treat to watch.

The story moves along as Louise (later, Gypsy Rose Lee) and her sister June Hovick (later, actress June Havoc) grow up, but do the same act they did when small children.

Mama Rose insists the sisters, having grown into young women, can maintain the illusion of being kids.

The demise of vaudeville ends that illusion. But Mama Rose insistence her girls will be great vaudeville stars.

Benson's superb performance is well supported by Michael Kostroff, who plays Herbie, the girls' agent and frustrated never-to-be Mama Rose's fourth husband.

In desperation to find work, Herbie books Mama Rose's 'Hollywood Blondes' into a burlesque theater. Mama is enraged but realizes it's that or nothing.

It's that experience that leads to the creation of Gypsy Rose Lee. Mama convinces Louise she can become a striptease artist without compromising her dignity.

'Remember, you're a lady,' Mama Rose tells her daughter.

'Gypsy' is a musical, a drama and a comedy.

Laughs come throughout the show, but reach a crescendo when two not very good burlesque dancers--- Mazeppa, played by intern Allison Heyman and Electra, played by intern Marissa Rosen—do a very funny routine to the song 'You Gotta Get a Gimmick.'

The scenes in the burlesque theater depict the less-than-proper and tough life of burlesque entertainers. Also, some of the language is mildly profane, but what one would expect in such an environment. By today's standards, the language and the burlesque performances are tame.

Brittany Bailey, an intern, plays Gypsy Rose Lee with the right amount of reservation about becoming a stripper. As she gains confidence, however, Gypsy creates a provocative act, without being lewd.

Her sexy rendition of 'Let Me Entertain You' adds to her classy act.

The show's drama intensifies as Gypsy becomes more successful and her own person. Her rejection of Mama Rose's overpowering interference is filled with pathos.

The entire production was carried off with seamless transitions between scenes, and one scene flowed into another.

The set effectively used the Opera House's natural structure as the backdrop for this show about show business. The lighting effectively highlighted the action and the sound system—performers used small hidden microphones—added to the performance.

This performance of 'Gypsy' doesn't diminish the many fine performances conducted at the Opera House over the past 30 years. It does, however, take the theater to a new level of professional entertainment.



The Rocky Horror Show – The NJ Star-Ledger Review

'The Rocky Horror Show' review: You can join in the fun— or just enjoy the show

Published: Friday, November 05, 2010, 8:04 AM

By Peter Filichia/For The Star-Ledger



Jason Meehan Christopher Timson, left, Jennifer Bowles and Chris Hall in the ReVision Theatre production of "The Rocky Horror Show." They're asking for it.

At ReVision Theatre in Asbury Park, the game cast of "The Rocky Horror Show" comes onstage, yells to the crowd "Gimme an R! Gimme an O!" — and continues the request right through C, K and Y.

And the crowd is only too happy to shout the letters back.

Crackerjack director Thomas Morrissey knows what he's doing. He's telling his audience, "Yes — just in case you were worried or wondering, audience participation is not only allowed but encouraged."

"The Rocky Horror Show" was the first "so-bad-it's-good" musical, paving the way for "Little Shop of Horrors" and later musicals that were genuine horrors. ("Rocky" at least gets literary points by keeping the Greek myth of Damocles alive, naming one of its songs for him.)

And getting the crowd involved has been the "Rocky" raison d'être since those midnight showings of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" — the film based on the musical — began

in the late '70s. To yell out a description of Brad Majors' status or Janet Weiss' sex life has been de rigueur at screenings of the film, which has been playing in limited release for more than 35 years.

But don't worry. If you haven't caught the show in all that time and remain unfamiliar with the bits of the show in which the audience, by long custom, takes part, at ReVision you'll find a very helpful screen high above the action, projecting instructions.

Those who prefer to simply listen will have a great time too.

The Asbury Park crowd is so devoted it should be on the payroll. Audience members grab the props that ushers dispense — rice to be thrown at the wedding that Brad and Janet attend and a little flashlight to light when the couple remarks that "There's a light over at the Frankenstein place." This show could be over in less than an hour and 40 minutes — but the audience's comments and catcalls push it beyond two hours.

For the uninitiated: Brad and Janet, two straight arrows, wander into that castle, where they meet Frank N. Furter, a cross-dresser engaged in creating, from scratch, an attractive muscle man as his lover.

Chris Hall is a splendid Furter, the not so sweet transvestite. Considering the way Hall contorts his mouth around his lyrics, it's a wonder the glitter in his lipstick doesn't fly off. The real miracle, however, is how he can walk (let alone dance) in those towering heels.

Jennifer Bowles is deliciously daffy as Janet and Christopher Timson is beautifully square as Brad. Furter's lackeys shine as well — Jesse Wildman, an ideal Columbia, has a delightfully squeaky voice. Hernando Umana makes Riff-Raff his own special creation and doesn't rely on aping what Richard O'Brien did in the film.

Blake Evan Sherman is fun as Brad's friend Dr. Scott. When he comes on, the audience, to honor his surname, pelts the stage with Scott toilet tissue.

So it's not classic. But it is fun. The lines with which Riff-Raff introduces "The Time Warp" prove to be good advice to theatergoers — "Time is fleeting."

Both the players and the participatory audience will have to take their final bows on Nov. 13.

The Rocky Horror Show

Where: ReVision Theatre, Carousel House, 700 Ocean Ave., Asbury Park

When: *Through Nov. 13. Thursday and Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 2 and 8 p.m., Sunday at 7 p.m. Special midnight showings on Nov. 12 and Nov. 13 (in lieu of the matinee).*

How much: \$15-\$45. Call (732) 455-3059 or visit revisiontheatre.org

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Reviews

NO NO NANETTE **Tri-Arts Playhouse** **Tri-State Center for the Arts, Pine Plains, NY**

Jazz Age Gem, Tri-Arts “No No Nanette” thoroughly impresses and Charms as well

Set in the roaring ‘20s, this production directed and choreographed by Thomas Morrissey certainly does roar with all the lightness and camp of a much simpler time. Morrissey has dug deep and mined the script for all its worth.

This production of “No No Nanette is a very very funny piece of solid theatre that as it happens is highlighted by much-touted singing and dancing and punctuated by gags and more gags.

The dancing in “No No Nanette” is non-stop, with all sorts of theatrical gags that are as ebulliently tongue-in-cheek as the play itself. This show is a hoot and it manages to reach with equal hilarity audience members of any and all ages.

Absolute theatrical excess, [you’ll] remember this show for all the wit and color that constantly flies on and off stage.

-Linda Pack Butler, The Taconic

‘No No Nanette,’ Cheery

The Production directed and choreographed by Thomas Morrissey, starts with his trademark: the overture is choreographed. This and other numbers move briskly and occasionally smack of Busby Berkley style movements, which is not all bad.

Morrissey smartly has his actors play the play for the sweet silliness it is. It’s hard to resist tapping your feet when this versatile cast performs the musical numbers. If you like to go to a show where you can leave your mind at home and just be comfy, Tri-Arts’ “No No Nanette” is for you.

-Macey Levin, Hudson Valley Compass

Tri-Arts’ ‘Nanette’ Remains Focused, Direction, Choreography are Solid

The summer musical theatre house presented a fun evening in singing, dancing and jokes. The musical is a totally frivolous story, but sometimes it is pleasant not to think and relax and hum along. The show held focus throughout and Thomas Morrissey’s direction and choreography were solid.

-Katherine Ryan Aldrich, Poughkeepsie Journal

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HELLO, DOLLY! ROCKWELL PRODUCTIONS

The Grand Candlelight Theatre
Lewisburg/Milton, PA Area

The Media Theatre
Philadelphia Area

Thomas Morrissey directs and choreographs at an exuberant gallop keeping the cast of [24] jumping. The title song's athletic dances are the highlight. And the fast paced fully choreographed scene changes make the most of the Media Theatre's notorious staging challenges. ...musical comedy is only partly about visual spectacle, it's about song, dance, fun and romance and "Hello Dolly!" has plenty. ...Rockwell productions, the producing arm of the Media Theatre for the Performing Arts does us a favor by presenting a fine fully staged "Hello Dolly!"

*-Mark Cofta, Delaware County News
(BACKSTAGE Pub. Correspondent)*

"Hello Dolly!" is a gem

Rockwell's pros take you where you're suppose to be. Don't miss this engagement. ...Another standout scene is when the waiters dance at the Harmonia Gardens restaurant. They do a caterpillar-like move that has to be seen to be believed. Go see "Hello Dolly," and you'll have a fun night out.

-Milton Daily Star

Matchmaker Gets Enthusiastic Reception On Opening Night

...Few minuses diminish not a whit the enjoyment of the show from the fine singing down to the professional choreography and direction by **Thomas Morrissey**. Go see "Hello Dolly!" again you won't be disappointed.

-Frank Rapp, Press Focus

Dolly is saying hello again, this time at the Media Theatre, and it's a pleasure to see her once more. As staged and choreographed by **Thomas Morrissey**, this production sparkles with an able cast and a talented ensemble that can sing and dance impressively.

-Faye & Al Golde, A&L Magazine/Press Focus

Thomas Morrissey staged an effective "Hello, Dolly!" choreographing the scene changes and keeping this big old show bouncing along. The show features adventurous athletic dancing and some spirited performances.

-In The Limelight, M.C.

The chorus boys deserve combat pay for their joint-endangering leaps. *-Hats Off Review*

Director and choreographer **Thomas Morrissey** has to be congratulated for the bold dance numbers. So much movement by so many on the Media stage is a wonder. *-Delaware County Daily Times*

Everyone's favorite matchmaker is back where she belongs. Special kudos to the ensemble, mainly the men, whose flying feet deserve special mention and received applause during the "Waiters Gallop." You belong in the Grand Candlelight Theatre too if you want to catch this entertaining whirlwind in action. *-Jack Felix*

The Show's liveliest moment is the "Waiters Gallop" an intricately choreographed bit of dashing and tumbling by the overly excited waiters. They make the best of their time on stage and earn some spontaneous applause. *-John Chambliss, Daily Local News*

Full reviews and press clippings available upon request

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OKLAHOMA!

Bucks County Playhouse, New Hope, PA

Bucks County offerings prove theatre truism

A good production can rescue a lame script, and an excellent script can survive a tame production. Better than both, however, is a nifty production of a great show—like the Bucks County Playhouse rendition of “Oklahoma!”

Directed and choreographed by **Thomas Morrissey**, the playhouse production is fresh and unselfconscious, with a bright and energetic cast who wipe away the 50 years that this corn high entertainment has been with us. With a cast this fresh the show really is brand new...they throw themselves into it with sincerity and nary a touch of condescension, and the result is an authentic naivete that transmits itself to the audience. If you haven't seen this show in a long time, you might find yourself listening to “Oh, what a beautiful morning” with fresh attentiveness.

—*New Hope Gazette, Anita Donovan-*

Spirited ‘Oklahoma!’ at Playhouse

“Oklahoma!” has opened at the Bucks County Playhouse and it is a warm, poignant revival. The evening is warm and tender.

—*Courier Times-*

‘Oklahoma!’ breathless, alive in Bucks

Director/choreographer **Thomas Morrissey** isn't afraid to cut loose from 50 years of tradition and stage numbers the way he imagines them. It works beautifully in the dance that accompanies the overture, he deserves praise for innovating.

OKLAHOMA!

Pocono Playhouse, PA

‘Oklahoma!’ sweeps into Pocono Playhouse

It is directed and choreographed deftly by **Thomas Morrissey**

—*ThePocono Record, Julie Luongo-*

‘Oklahoma!’ brightens dreary day

Why “Oklahoma!” ran for five years and nine months after it's '43 Broadway opening, then a record setting feat, is demonstrated once again in a repeat booking at Pocono Playhouse...brightening a rainy day for an audience who found dance dominant at a spirited performance for which Thomas Morrissey was the director & choreographer.

—*The Tribune Drama Critic, Sid Benjamin-*

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SCRAMBLED FEET

Millbrook Playhouse, Mill Hall, PA

Directed and choreographed by **Thomas Morrissey**, “Scrambled Feet” deals with the subject of [actors] agents, the frustration of auditions, creative blocks and child stardom to name a few.

The first act is fast paced and packed with varying types of slapstick humor, including innuendo, puns and stereotypes.

One song especially stands out—“Could Have Been” re-unites former aspiring acting buddies in a poignant duet about broken dreams.

On the lighter side Pontius Pilot and Christ do a rollicking vaudeville sketch complete with straw hats, canes and one-liners. Later the shows three male actors dress in drag as the hysterically funny “Theatre Party Ladies.”

We [the audience] laughed sometimes, we listened and we watched as the actors joked, sang and danced their way through a series of some 22 sketches, each taking a satirical look at some aspect of ‘Showbiz’ life.

-The Lock Haven Express, Lisa Andrus-

CAMELOT

Pocono Playhouse, PA

‘Camelot’ is first rate show

Camelot one of the best

As the [Pocono] Playhouse continued it’s 51st season, “Camelot” opened to heavy applause from an audience of about 400. It appears to join “Crazy for You,” which closed Sunday, as the two best shows out of five presented so far this summer.

Under the direction of **Thomas Morrissey** (also the choreographer), a gifted company was in excellent voice. It provided first-rate entertainment that has been surpassed rarely at [the Pocono Playhouse] Mountainhome.

-The Tribune Drama Critic, Sid Benjamin-

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THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE LaComedia Dinner Theatre Cincinnati - Dayton Ohio area in Springboro

Light Pirates of Penzance

I was never an aficionado of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas- From snippets here and there I assumed they were prissy and, let's face it, stupid. But since LaComedia Dinner Theatre was giving me a night out for free, and throwing in dinner, I drove 30miles or so to take in *Pirates of Penzance*.

It was well worth the trip. The plot is, in fact, incredibly stupid, but the brilliance of the music and fine production made for a fun evening.

Under the direction of **Thomas Morrissey**, LaComedia mounted an energetic, very physical production with a cast of twenty.

-Pat Morris, Everybody's News

'Penzance' comical blend of pirates and opera

Pirates and opera don't usually go together, but they mesh very well in "The Pirates Of Penzance" now playing at La Comedia Dinner Theatre. The cast at La Comedia does an excellent job recreating a musical masterpiece that was created prior to the turn of this century. It is a piece full of artistic culture and history and a great way to introduce someone to opera.

-Beth Callahan, The Chronicle

'Pirates' capture imagination with wit, Charm

Is it appropriate for children? Yes, definitely. It's silly and busy and full of pirates and policemen on the loose in the audience and that will surely appeal to the younger crowd.

Does it play to adults? Yes, in terms of singing, tap dancing and the jokes. By any definition this cast is flawlessly talented – exceptional, every one of them. "The Pirates of Penzance" is a light-hearted, no-brain musical diversion that reminds us of the magic of simple things – be it flying pirates, flashlights in the dark, or honor. Should someone suggest it walk the plank I would draw my sword to rescue it.

-Victoria Rvan. Enventure!