

'State Fair,' A Family Affair

Written by Barbara K. Clark
Tuesday, 05 May 2015 11:49

Spring time is the perfect time for a state fair and May River Theatre's first show of the season is smack on with their version of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *State Fair*. I call this show one of Rodgers & Hammerstein's "sleepers" as most people know the names of two of the songs in the show rather than the title itself.

Might As Well Be Spring

and

It's a Grand Night for Singing

will bring back memories for many.

Premiering as a movie in 1945 and remade in 1962, the stage production closely follows the plot of its predecessors, providing a glimpse into the life of the Frake family and their three-day adventure at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines. And family is what this cast is all about!

Parents Abel and Melissa Frake are portrayed by husband and wife, Jeff and Beth Corry , who are hoping to win blue ribbons, while siblings Margy (Emily Rice) and Wayne (Thaddeus Miller) are more interested in finding romance on the midway. Miller's wife, Christa Fortney, plays Eleanor, Wayne's sweetheart back home. His love interest is portrayed by May River veteran Ellie Friedmann Beck and Ellie's daughter Lily is gracing the ensemble. Margy's love interest is Pat Gilbert, a big city reporter, played by Chad Hsu.

Ron Ruckle, last seen in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, is also sharing the stage with his daughter Hope last seen in *The Music Man*. Twin sisters Adelaide and Anna Camden Shirley are once again sharing their lovely voices in the ensemble. Both were sisters in *Annie Get Your Gun*.

The original book was written by Tom Briggs and Louis Mattioli. The movie was based on Phil Stong's book *State Fair* and the 1945 film. The Broadway production was co-directed by James Hammerstein (Oscar's son) and Randy Skinner and choreographed by Skinner. It opened March of 1996 at the Music Box Theatre, where it ran for 110 performances. It was the final show produced by the legendary David Merrick and the show received 1996 Tony nominations for Best Score and Best Featured Actor in a Musical.

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In 2010 the show opened at London's Trafalgar Studios 2. *The Guardian's* review said "It's a great night out, and as exhilarating as a hoedown." May River Theatre's version promises to be just that!

Produced by the May River Theatre Company, the husband and wife team, Terri and Chad Hsu are co-directors and choreographers with Warren Heilman as Music Director.

State Fair will play from May 8 through May 24 Friday and Saturday evenings at 8 p.m. and Sunday matinees at 3 p.m. at the Ulmer Auditorium at Bluffton Town Hall.

State Fair is presented with special permission from R & H Theatricals New York, New York.

Tickets are available by calling the box office at 843.815.5581. Box office hours are 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Friday. All reserved seats are \$25.