

Musical version of "Guys and Dolls" to be performed

May 24, 1978

A lean and spare ensemble interpretation of Frank Loesser's musical version of Damon Runyon's "Guys and Dolls" will be presented at 8 p.m. Wednesday, May 31, through Saturday, June 3, by the John Muir Theatre Ensemble in room 2250, Humanities and Social Sciences Bldg., Muir campus, at the University of California, San Diego.

According to its guest director Sabin Epstein, "Guys and Dolls" presents a particular challenge to the philosophy of the John Muir Theatre, an approach which has been described as "shoestring theater."

"One feels extraordinarily vulnerable creatively," says Epstein. "It's all up to the actor. There's not a great deal you can do to disguise and divert. Automatically you sense yourself taking enormous risks. Not only the players, but the audience must be imaginative and inventive."

The audience for a musical like "Guys and Dolls," Epstein explains, is full of expectations and preconceptions that what it is about to see will be "heavy on spectacle, with lots of sets, everything flying, traveling curtains, big and brassy vocal and dance numbers. "

At UC San Diego, in the Muir Theatre's adapted lecture hall, the sets will consist of two cubes, about five chairs, a ladder and two benches. The musical accompaniment will be a piano. There is no outside choreographer and the student actors, under Epstein's guidance, are designing the musical numbers cooperatively and virtually by themselves. The costumes for the show will be "basic Salvation Army, a little too big as though the actors had raided someone's attic and dressed up," Epstein said.

The net effect of challenging the actors and the audience with a musical production which is deliberately spare and sparse, scaled down, stripped of decoration, shunning the "seduction of lights and props and costumes," is indeed the "lean theater" the Muir Ensemble pledges, but a "lean theater," concludes Epstein, "which becomes very rich and fattening."

"Guys and Dolls" is the third presentation of the John Muir Theatre Ensemble, which was funded by a UC San Diego Instructional Improvement Grant. The grant not only supports the productions of the ensemble group but made possible the refurbishing of the lecture hall where the plays are presented to enable it to double a few days each quarter as a public theater.

The members of the ensemble with their director are totally responsible for all aspects of each production, designing and building all set pieces and properties and designing and operating the lighting and sound systems. A limit of \$250 has been set for all expenses for each production. A new company is auditioned and chosen for each play.

During the fall quarter a new production of "The Bacchae" was presented and during winter quarter, Bertolt Brecht's "The Caucasian Chalk Circle." The three plays have served as models for three drama courses in which students have examined and discussed epic theater, tragedy and comedy, in part by observing rehearsals of each play and reviewing and evaluating the work of the ensemble.

Tickets for each performance are 99 cents at the door on the evenings of the performance.

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