

A sweet stroll back in time

Artbeat

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Love Affairs and Wedding Bells



By **Doug Deuchler**
Blogger

This charming historical musical, set in Chicago during the picturesque 1893 Columbian Exposition, provides plenty of romance, humor and escapism. The show is produced by Suburban West Actors' Guild, SWAG, which has come a

long way since they mounted their first production, *Fiddler on the Roof*, on stage at Beye School last November. We seldom review theatrical productions outside this community, but *Love Affairs and Wedding Bells*, which is enjoying its debut run at Chicago's Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont on the North Side, has a cast containing a number of local performers and crew members. It is produced by SWAG Executive Director Lou Galecki (stage name Lou Gale), mother to TV actor Johnny Galecki (*Roseanne* and *The Big Bang Theory*).

Love Affairs and Wedding Bells — perhaps not the slickest title possible — is a lot of fun. Written by two Chicago authors, Tina Montgomery (book) and Mark Burrows (music and lyrics), the show was the winner of the 2015 Fullerton Playwrights Festival and has received other awards and honors. But until now there has never been a full production of the work. Perhaps potential theater troupes were put off by the thought of staging a world's fair and by the period costumes and sets required to pull it off. SWAG handles these challenges quite creatively.

The multi-generational musical reminds me of those big nostalgic MGM musicals of the 1940s like *Meet Me in St. Louis* or *In the Good Old Summertime*. I'm not sure I was humming Burrows' show tunes on the way home, and there wasn't anything that really sounded like the ragtime era, but the music was all lively and fun. Best of all, you could understand the lyrics. The singers are very good.

The director, Judy Rosignuolo-Rice, presents a well-balanced, tightly-paced show which showcases a solid mixture of strong, experienced performers in the main roles as well as a few others who might be categorized as relative newcomers in the chorus or as supporting players. They all interact well and do most of the "stage-hand work" of changing set pieces during scene transitions. The assistant director is Bernard Rice.

The world's fair is featured in the first of the two acts. The Columbian Exposition of 1893, which covered 690 acres on the South Side of Chicago, was one of the key social and cultural events of the late 19th century. Over 27 million people attended the fair.

Kiosk-style set pieces are angled so that various black-line paintings suggest buildings or architectural details to denote a change of scenes. It's very smartly

handled. Populated with a variety of "extras" strolling in period attire, it seems like one really is visiting the Midway Plaisance.

The plot focuses on two lovely sisters, Mazie and Lily Ungebelt, whose German immigrant father, the "sausage king" played by Sam Buonomo, is a meat-packing millionaire like Armour or Swift or Oscar Meyer. Mazie (Ricci Prioletti), the youngest, is a rather empty-headed social climber who has fantasized that Albert Appleton III (Joseph Sergio) from an "old money" Boston family wants to marry her. But sparks actually are flying between Albert and Mazie's older sister Lily (Anita Gabor) and though Lily fights the urge at first, it's clear she and Albert are both smitten with one another. He does not care for pushy, manipulative Mazie at all.

Delusional Mazie believes her "beau" Albert is too reticent and stand-offish. She wants to turn up the heat romantically so she writes to his snobbish, high-society mother in Boston to invite her to visit the fair as their house guest. Mazie figures with Albert's mother there, her son will accept the young lady as his fiancée.

Albert's old buddy Franklin (David Fred Mosely), a debonair and well-to-do Boston heir, is visiting too. He finds himself drawn to Mazie. The actor is agile and funny, and the pair are adorable when they dance together.

The haughty Bostonian dowager, Mrs. Appleton, is well-played by Mimi Sagadin. She is perfect as an arrogant, uppity battle-axe. She forbids her son to marry into the German Ungebelt family. "If he is smitten," she sings, "the will can be rewritten."

The Ungebelt sisters' Aunt Lucinda functions when needed as a chaperone or confidante. Played by Christy McInterney, the character is warm-hearted and delightful. This aunt lived with the family since the girls' mother died when they were small children. She knows the dangers of gambling with love.

Love Affairs and Wedding Bells is sweet and enjoyable.

With two weekend left, it is playing Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m., through October 8. \$30; \$25, students and seniors. Tickets/info: 773-975-8150, facebook.com/LoveAffairsWeddingBellsMusical.