

GSM providing enchanted evenings through June 24

By Patty Montagno

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I heard “Balj Ha’i” calling and drove straight to the Granville Arts Center to watch the Garland Summer Musicals 2012 season opener “South Pacific.”

Set on a South Pacific island during World War II, the 1949 musical delves into racial prejudice through the story of a Navy nurse from Little Rock and a mysterious French plantation owner. It all plays out amid an enthusiastic and colorful cast of sailors, island natives and nurses. The Garland production exemplifies why this show was part of the golden age of Broadway musicals. The adorable Morgan Mabry Mason, the spunky and bubbly young Nellie Forbush who falls madly in love with the suave plantation owner Brian Mathis as Emile de Becque, leads the show.

The two professionals easily bring Rodgers and Hammerstein’s beautiful music to life. When Mathis sings, “Some Enchanted Evening” and “This Nearly Was Mine,” the audience was noticeably captivated. Aaron White won my heart as the ill-fated Lt. Joe Cable, and Marjorie Hayes maintains that delicate balancing act between comedy and pathos as Bloody Mary. Her rendition of “Bali Ha’I” was glorious. Every time Terry McEnroe took to the stage as the quintessential huckster Luther Billis, the audience roared with laughter. McEnroe is a masterful comic. The showstopper “There Is Nothin’ Like a Dame,” was probably the best version of that number I have ever seen. Choreographer Joseph Jones should get a standing ovation for that one alone. The sets are gorgeous; costumes are fun and helped bring the characters to life.

The remarkable Buff Shurr, who is celebrating his 30th anniversary with the GSM, directed the show. Also at the helm was producer Patty Granville. Granville played Forbush in 1996 when she co-starred with the late legendary Broadway performer John Raitt. Shurr and Granville, both accomplished performers, work in complete unison. Their attention to detail was right on point. From the wonderful overture it was quite evident that the director, producer, cast and crew shared one common goal: to bring a wonderful script to life – and that is exactly what happened.

You just can’t beat Rodgers and Hammerstein. Buy a ticket and watch the volcano erupt on the stage of the Granville Arts Center June 22, 23 and 24.