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Pacific Overtures

Garland Summer Musicals kicks off summertime with the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic *South Pacific*.

by Perry Stewart

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photo: Patty Granville

"South Pacific" at Garland Summer Musicals

Here's the forecast for Garland: enchanted evenings, and the occasional enchanted afternoon.

The ever-golden oldie, *South Pacific*, is filling the Granville Arts Center with the soaring melodies of Richard Rodgers and the trenchant lyrics of Oscar Hammerstein. If you thought that,

after six decades, this musical might be showing its age, **Garland Summer Musicals** producer Patty Granville and her ace production team will banish such heresy.

As he did at Fort Worth's Casa Mañana for many summers, director Buff Shurr sets a happily brisk pace, while counseling his cast members to pause and savor a moment or a melodic phrase.

And what a cast—vocal and acting prowess aplenty. Brian Mathis and Morgan Mabry Mason lead the pack as Emile de Becque, a wealthy expatriate Frenchman living on an island in the South Pacific and Nellie Forbush, a Navy nurse from Little Rock. It's World War II. People from vastly different cultures meet and clash and sometimes fall in love.

The test for any De Becque portrayer is, of course, "Some Enchanted Evening," and Mathis sings it beautifully. He's a low baritone rather than a bass like Ezio Pinza, creator of the role. That's fine. The power is there, and Mathis reaches the high pianissimo at the end of the song with seeming ease.

Mason's Nellie is huggably appealing and multi-faceted. She's the vulnerable knucklehead of "A Cockeyed Optimist," the feisty take-charger who is "Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair" and, ultimately, the gloriously smitten girl in love with "A Wonderful Guy," a number that choreographer Joseph Jones garnishes nicely.

Marjorie Hayes is a bright light as Bloody Mary, the hustling islander who lures American military personnel to the mysterious island of "Bali Ha'i." Hayes navigates the operatic currents of that song, and she scores with the patter-like "Happy Talk."

Aaron White has the requisite vocal clout and the boyish charm for Lt. Cable, the naive Princeton grad who, like Nellie, grapples with cross-cultural romance. His two vastly different solos, the lilting "Younger Than Springtime" and the angry, bold for its time "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," are both delivered skillfully. Missing is "My Girl Back Home," Cable's duet with Nellie, which was cut from the original Broadway production and restored in the 1958 movie.

Terry McEnroe provides a full-throttle portrayal of Luther Billis, the conniving Seabee who is notorious for his money making schemes. Rod Blaydes and Ron Biancardi add bluster as the Navy brass vexed by Billis' various enterprises.

Larry B. Miller, conducting a 15-piece orchestra, has a winning way with the Rodgers score. This is evident from the opening notes of the overture.

Ah, yes, the overture. A brassy, soaring, old school overture. You might call it music to the ear.