

REVIEW: Cast entertains with 'Fantasticks'

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THE GAZETTE

EDITOR'S NOTE: We recently named the Thin Air Theatre Company the Best New Theater Company in the region. Their original melodramas are some of the best anywhere. They have expanded the theatrical offerings in Cripple Creek to include more mainstream musicals. "The Fantasticks" plays in rotation with "Godspell."

Quick. What's the longest-running musical in theater history?

No, not "The Phantom of the Opera," although at 22 years and counting, it's easily the longest-running Broadway musical.

The answer is "The Fantasticks," which ran a whopping 42 years off Broadway before finally closing in 2002.

And if you ask why this small-cast musical, currently being produced by Cripple Creek's Thin Air Theatre Company, was so successful, I can answer you in four words.

I have no idea.

In it, Harvey Schmidt and Tom Jones (no, not that Tom Jones) created a modern-day fable, with a generic setting and generic characters, intending it to be a timeless statement on life and love.

But now it just seems incredibly dated.

When else but the 1960s could you have gotten away with such a disjointed, pretentious work in which two young people fall in and out of love for no plausible reason and a narrator beats you over the head with aphorisms worthy of a Hallmark card?

And don't get me started on the bland, repetitive songs.

Fortunately, the talented cast, though unable to raise it to the level of art, was at least able to raise it to the level of entertainment.

Laurie Sutton displays a strong voice and a captivating comic touch as Luisa, the girl as much in love with her own femininity as she is with the boy.

Nick Madson makes a perfect match as Matt, the boy who loves her, then leaves her to find his own way in the world.

He, too, has a strong voice, although it fades away to nothingness during duets.

It's Mel Moser, however, who steals the show as the hammy, dimwitted actor Henry. His facial expressions alone are enough to crack up an audience.

In fact, he's so well-loved at the Butte, he gets applause every time he steps on stage.

There is one unfortunate case of miscasting in David Craven.

Though dashing enough, he lacks the ruggedness required to make a convincing bandit as El Gallo.

Admittedly, "The Fantasticks" is a unique piece of theater history and that may be reason enough to see it.

But don't be surprised if you leave feeling it was less than "terrifick."

DETAILS

"The Fantasticks" by Thin Air Theatre Company

When: 7 p.m. Fridays, 1 and 7 p.m. Saturdays, 1 p.m. Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays through Sept. 26

Where: Butte Theater, 139 E. Bennett Ave., Cripple Creek

Tickets: \$15.75/\$13.75 seniors/\$9.75 kids; 689-3247 or butteoperahouse.com.

GRADE: C+