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By TOM WRONA

riting the last review of the summer season is always bittersweet for me. Surflight always ends with a Broadway classic to send the summer crowds away with fond memories to sustain them until next spring. And we year-rounders take solace in knowing that the end of the summer season means that the beginning of the fall season is right around the corner.

This year Surflight has not disappointed us. "The Music Man" is a great production of a great American musical. It's everything a musical comedy should be: witty, charming, funny and winning.

Most winning of all is Carrie Tillis, who stars as Marian "the librarian" Paroo, the love interest of the lovable con man Professor Harold Hill (Alan M-L Wager). Tillis is a superb actress and a magnificent singer. (She's sung opera, and you can hear it in her voice.) But more than that she projects a wonderful, homespun charm. You can't help thinking that she must be just as personable in real life as her characters are on stage, and that she would make a loving and understanding friend. That's an enormous asset for an actor and it bodes well for her continued success.

Her co-stars turned in admirable performances but some suffered by comparison to those who played the same parts in the 1962 movie version. Chief among these was Wager's Harold Hill. Wager is a talented actor and director. He was a great Henry Higgins in 2003's "My Fair Lady," and he did a good job directing "Beauty and the Beast" this year. But he just didn't match the manic zeal that Robert Preston brought to

SURFLIGHT REVIEW

Trouble in River City Means There's Joy in Beach Haven



DON'T GET CONNED: Professor Harold Hill (at far left, played by Alan M-L Wager) is out to pull a fast one with his sales pitch for a town band. The townfolk are not entirely sure about the matter, but Amaryllis (Alex Schettini, at the piano) knows music can't be a bad thing. Also pictured in the scene at left are Carrie Tillis as Marian the librarian, and Suzette Whiting as Marian's Irish mother.

the role he invented on stage and screen. Perhaps Wager will find his oomph as his performances continue.

Another Surflight favorite of mine who suffered a similar comparison was Andrew Foote, who played Hill's con-Marcellus federate, Washburn. Foote's portrayal was good but compared to the comic genius of Buddy Hackett - well, there's just no comparison. Similarly, the portrayals of Zaneeta Shinn (the "Ye gods!" girl) and her beau Tommy Djilas, by Heather Carino and Eric Giancola, were competent but unexceptional.

Those who successfully exorcised the spirits of their filmic predecessors include David DuPont and (2003's brilliant "Fanny") Melanie Kann as Mayor George Shinn and his (ahem) lovely wife Eulalie Mackechnie Shinn (portrayed so unforgettably by Paul Ford and Hermione Gingold in the movie). I also



enjoyed Suzette Whiting's portrayal of Marian's widowed mother – with an Irish brogue so thick it could slice an uncooked potato. And the barbershop quartet Hill forms, comprising Matty Price, Christopher Deaton, Keith Schneider and Richard Earl, did fine work, too.

But in a film with unfor-

gettable characters portrayed by legendary talents, who could forget young Ronny Howard's performance as Marian's lisping kid brother, Winthrop? We loved Howard as Andy Griffith's Opie, and Happy Days' Richie Cun-ningham. We grew to respect him as a director of hits like "Apollo 13" and "A Beautiful

Mind." If ever there was a tough act to follow, it's Howard. Fortunately for us, 10-year-old Timothy Goerg of Fairlawn, N.J., is a perfect Winthrop. He's not only a surprisingly accomplished actor and singer, the kid's adorable. I can imagine fe-males of all ages just wanting to pinch his cheeks and give him a hot chocolate or something.

"The Music Man" is a fitting end to this Surflight Summer season. But don't forget, there's another six shows coming our way in the fall season. I'll preview them in our final edition of 2005 next week.

Evening performances run through Sept. 3 at 8 p.m., except Aug. 28, 29; with matinees at 2 p.m. on August 25, 28, 30 and Sept.

Bonus Broadway Buff Trivia Question:

For the season finale, I'll give you two questions: First, what was unique about the Grammy Award the original cast album won in 1959? And second, Paul McCartney sang one of the songs from "The Music Man" on the 1964 hit album Meet the Beatles. Can you name it?

I'll give you the answers when I preview the Surflight's fall season in our big Labor Day Weekend issue next week.

Last time I asked you how many of the five songs that were added for the Broadway version of "Beauty and the were "No Matter What,"
"Home," "Me," "If I Can't
Love Her," and "Human
Again."

Tom Wrona is a writer and filmmaker based in Barnegat. You can let him know what you think of his reviews at tom@dangerous movies.com. And for more Island-area entertainment tidbits, visit his web site at wrona.com.

REGAL MANAHAWKIN 10, Kmart Plaza, 733 Rte. 72 east (978-5900) Call for show informa-

Serious

Al-Anon Meetings, (494-0543 or 296-3240) This is a 12-Step support group for friends and relatives of alcoholics. *Mon.*, Barnegat United Methodist Church,

682 East Bay Ave.; beginners, 10 am; step/discussion, 10:30 am. Tues., Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, 333 North Main St., Manahawkin; beginners, 7 pm; step/discussion, 7:30 pm. Wed., Mill Creek Community Center, 1199 Mill Creek Rd., Beach Haven West; beginners, 1 pm; discussion, 1:30 pm. Thurs., St. Francis Center, 47th St. & Long Beach Blvd., Brant Beach; beginners, 7:30 pm; step/discussion, 8 pm.

THROUGH AUGUST 31 Free Spinal Assessment with

Donation for Needy Children, Healing Hands of Manahawkin, 588 East Bay Ave. (978-4304) School supplies are being collected. The assessment, for new patients only, includes a spinal checkup, consultation, any necessary X-rays and report of findings. Call to drop off donation and make appointment.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31 American Red Cross Bloodmobile, Southern Ocean County Hospital, Ullmann Conference Center, 1140 Rte. 72 west, Manahawkin (800-GIVELIFE or www.pleasegiveblood.org) Most healthy people who weigh at least 110 pounds and are 17 or older are eligible to donate. Photo ID is required. A Red Cross parental consent form signed by parent or legal guardian is required for 17-year-olds. Noon-5

DARE Night for Parents, LBI Foundation of the Arts & Sciences, 120 Long Beach Blvd., Loveladies (494-1241) Lt. Paul Vereb of the Long Beach Twp. Police Dept. presents the program. 7 pm.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6 Free Blood Pressure Screening, Island Branch Ocean County Li-

brary, 217 South Central Ave., Surf City (494-2480) The LBI Health Dept. offers the service. 11 am-noon.

"Meet Your Local Press" Roundtable, Barnegat Branch Ocean County Library, 112 Burr St. (698-3331) Reporters on the local beat present the principles