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Friday 29 July 1977

'Guys & Dolls' — Pleasant Recognition

By WALTER LAZENBY
HARLESTON — Watching opening night performance Eastern's final summer w, "Guys and Dolls," last day night gave me a pleasant shock of recognition. For years (too many) I had named and sung six of the w's songs without knowing which musical they came from. Suddenly there they were, fitting interestingly into dramatic context in what has been called THE American social. There were two romantic leads, "I'll Know" (When My Love Comes Along) and "I've Never Been in Love Before," sung by an unlikely couple, a worldly evangelist and a gambling dandy.

A Review

There were two familiar numbers colorfully rendered in two night-club scenes by Adelaide and The Hot Box Dolls(!). For (I Love You) "A Bushel and a Peck" they wore appropriately corny costumes, and "Take Back Your Mink" they wore hardly any.

"If I Were a Bell" (I'd Be Ringing) took on plot significance at the moment one

character began to feel love stirring, as did "Luck Be a Lady" when it summarized the hopes of gamblers ready to continue New York's "oldest established" floating crap game.

In addition to these favorites, the poetic "My Time of Day" and the clever "Sue Me" and "Adelaide's Lament" tickled my fancy; and a hymn ("Follow the Fold") and a Latin melody ("Havana") contributed to the score's richness.

With Damon Runyon characters such as I have mentioned, the plot not surprisingly turns on whether Nathan Detroit can win enough money to hire a place for the crap game. To do so, he bets

that one of the guys cannot get one of the dolls to fly to Havana for dinner and an evening on the town. As a result of his maneuvering, two romances flourish.

As Nathan Detroit, Randy Haeger gives a stand-out performance. His loose-limbed but carefully controlled movements, his lively facial expressions, his New York-ese, his timing, and his gusto all make it noteworthy.

Bev Benda, as the Salvation Army lass, does a nice job changing pace after her recent appearance as a matron, and her singing is pleasant. Earl Halbe's singing of "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat" enlivens Act Two, Scene Five considerably.

I was a true put of by Dawn Decker's falsetto in the role of Adelaide, but I thought her accent was right (others in the cast would have done well to imitate it).

A distinct highlight is Alice Stoughton's smoothly choreographed "Crap Shooters Dance," featuring individualized "business" and asymmetrical groupings.

Having by chance sat in on auditions for this show, I was amazed at how far these amateur actors had progressed. My hat is off to those who brought out their potentialities so well — to Gerald and Barbara Sullivan and Alice Stoughton.

The final performance is Saturday night.