

5-7-1976

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Recommended Citation

Lazenby, Walter, "'Broadway' - Top-Notch Variety" (1976). *Walter Lazenby Reviews*. 35.
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Friday 7 May - 1976

'Broadway'—Top-Notch Variety

By WALTER LAZENBY

CHARLESTON — "The Best of Broadway," at Eastern through tomorrow night, showcases this semester's work of participants in the music theatre workshop.

Without connecting commentary, it follows the format used successfully two years ago. Nearly thirty performers present the group's selections mostly from standard fare of the last twenty years (exceptions from earlier years: one number each by Cohan, Gershwin, Porter, Weill, and Berlin). The whole constitutes two hours' worth of acting, dancing, and listenable singing, with some whistling and bird-calls thrown in.

There is variety in the staged duets and trios, the two barbershop quartet numbers, large ensemble pieces, and a lengthy dramatic excerpt from "Fiddler on the Roof."

Delbert Simon is musical director, and Gerald Sullivan, with B.J. Heft, has supervised staging. Tony Cox and Glenna James make the music.

Dress rehearsal Wednesday night gave promise of a

smooth-running show, though in some instances the chorus overshadowed soloists and the dramatic excerpt was more satisfying musically than otherwise. (But it seems obvious to me that it is impossible

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to become an accomplished singer AND actor all in one semester.)

In my book, the best staged numbers were "You Could

Drive a Person Crazy," "Elegance," "It's Never Too Late to Fall in Love," and "Friendship." Debbie Gaule's choreography had a nice Russian flavor and worked well.

The song "Mata Hari," from "Little Mary Sunshine," was somewhat spoiled for me because the singers kept pronouncing the title character's name differently.

I found Fred Norris at his best in the comic selection from "Oliver" and JoAnn Pottorff at hers in "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?" Stephen

Zehr and Hillary Nicholson appeared in a polished duet from "Camelot," and Zehr also shone with Cheryl Cannon in "It's Never Too Late."

Cindi Switzer, who has shown more accomplishment with each succeeding show she has appeared in, gave a fine rendition of "Razzle Dazzle." Mike Madlem's strong-voiced delivery of "Home" caught the mood of the song well, and I found Becky Eisenhower and David Stotlar charming in their performances as innocent lovers ("Goodnight").

Surely Terry Kelly's delightful voice was all the highlighting he needed; yet the staging placed him at stage center on a pedestal for two different numbers; and the flim-flam finale came straight out of the Victorian theatre.

"The Best of Broadway" will be staged at 8 p.m. tonight and Saturday in the EIU Fine Arts Theatre.