

# El Gallo presents a sweet, entrancing 'Fantasticks'

Eastern Illinois University Theatre continued its 2004-2005 season this past week with a five-performance run of "The Fantasticks" in the Village Theatre.

Based on Edmond Rostand's "Les Romanesques," with book and lyrics by Tom Jones and music by Harvey Schmidt, "The Fantasticks" is a variation on a Pierrot and Columbine theme.

A boy and a girl, who are neighbors, are in love as long as a wall separates them and they believe that their fathers disapprove. Actually, the fathers want them to marry and, to kindle an irresistible romantic mood, they hire El



Gallo to stage a mock rape in the moonlight so the boy can rescue the girl and seem a hero.

In the second act, the moonlight turns to sunlight. The youngsters discover their fathers' ploy, fall out, and go their separate ways. Eventually, however, they return to each other, disillusioned but wiser and mature.

"The Fantasticks" opened

in 1960 to indifferent notices at a 150-seat New York theater and seemed in danger of closing. But a small band of loyalists helped publicize it, and it won the Vernon Rice Award for the best off-Broadway show of the season.

When "Try to Remember" and then "Soon It's Gonna Rain" became popular, the show's success was assured. Forty-two years later, on Jan. 13, 2002, it closed for the longest continuous run of record in the American theater.

Eastern's production showed why. Director Jean Wolski gave it an imaginative, inventive staging as sort of a masque in the set-

ting of a one-ring circus, which enhanced the make-believe quality of the show and appealed to the child in us.

Everyone in the cast shone. Meghan Parks and Aaron Lawson were appealing and sang sweetly as the girl and boy. J.J. Bradley was debonair, worldly and in good voice as El Gallo.

Brandon Brown and Brian Aycock were delightful as the fathers. Cory Vogt was amusing as an old ham actor and would have been even more so with a bit of declaiming, and Garin Jones got laughs for his dying routines as Mortimer. And Abigail Duke made a graceful mute.

Musical director Jerry Daniels did well by them, and the charming, simple melodies were beautifully played by pianist R. Jason Yarcho.

The set and lighting were by David Wolski, and the colorful costumes by Karen Eisenhour.

This "Fantasticks" was small, sweet, intimate musical theater at its entrancing, endearing best.

Coming up in November: Arthur Miller's "All My Sons."

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