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By WALTER LAZENBY
HARLESTON — Watching opening night performance Eastern's final summer with "Guys and Dolls," last day night gave me a pleasant shock of recognition.

For years (too many) I had queued and sung six of the work's songs without knowing which musical they came from. Ideally there they were, fitting interestingly into dramatic context in what has been called THE American musical.

There were two romantic lads, "I'll Know" (When My Love Comes Along) and "I've Never Been in Love Before," sung by an unlikely couple, a New York evangelist and a gam-ving dandy.

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 Haegel gives a stand-out performance. His loose-limbed but carefully controlled movements, his lively facial expressions, his New Yorkese, 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 fan of 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 in individualized "business" and asymmetrical groupings.

Having by chance sat in at 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.