

Mac-Haydn Theatre, Chatham, NY

The Sound of Music, Book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein, II, Music by Richard Rodgers. Directed by John Saunders.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“How Can Love Survive?”

After seeing Mary Martin, then Nancy Dussault, play Maria Rainer that original production’s impression was replaced by over a dozen third-rate presentations of “The Sound of Music” which effectively convinced me that the show was not great but actually a stinker dependent on top-rate personalities to survive. Well, there are no major names in the current Mac-Haydn edition of the show and the result is both brilliant and restorative. I still don’t like a few of the songs, but the show itself is wonderful, due in part to the Maria of Sarah Naughton who is terrific. Credit goes to an excellent cast and a marvelous director, John Saunders. While this version does include the two songs that Richard Rodgers wrote for the film version it does present the show much as he and Hammerstein conceived it back in 1959. It runs just under three hours and the time flies by.



Sarah Naughton; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

The show is a fictionalized version of the von Trapp marriage and life. Captain Georg von Trapp and his second wife Maria were wed in 1927 and when the Nazis took over Austria, they fled to Italy by train in 1938, then to England and finally to the United States. The musical moves the entire story into that final year giving it a more dramatic presentation than was actually lived. For a musical, it works. And here it works very well. The seven von Trapp children have been double-cast for this production; I saw the cast that included Aidan Brennan as Friederich,

Emmett Mazurowski as Kurt, Quinn McCarthy as Brigitta, Makayla Shores as Marta, Riley O’Kane as Louisa and the delightful Charlotte Miler as Gretl, the youngest child. Liesl, the oldest, was played by Rachel Revellese who was a perfect 16 year old innocent.

Von Trapp’s friends Max Detweiler and Elsa Schraeder are played by Arthur Beutel and Elizabeth Gurland. Entrusted with the two “comic” songs, “No Way to Stop It” and “How Can Love Survive?” they do vrey creditable work but the songs have never been that funny and here they live up to their reputations. Still, they make their points and keep the show on an even keel. Both actors are lovely in their roles.



(Clockwise from left) Emmett Mazurowski, Quinn McCarthy, Rachel Revellese, Aidan Brennan, Makayla Shores, Riley O’Kane, Charlotte Miller; Photo: Ann Kielbasa

The chorus of nuns are well-played and the three principals do perfect work singing about

Maria and her difficulties as a postulant. Emily Allen, Judith Wyatt and Amber Mawande-Spytek are an excellent trio and with the Mother Abbess, played by the superb Alexandra Haines they leave a stunning impression of theatrical professionalism. When Haines sings “Climb Ev’ry Mountain at the end of Act One it is a definitive show-stopping moment leaving the promise of grand things to come. The promise is kept indeed.



(L-R) Alex Haines, Judith Wyatt, Emily Allen;
Photo: Ann Kielbasa

Minor characters are well-shown in this edition. Ofer Gordon is a disturbing Rolf, a potentially romantic figure with a political allegiance that, post WWII, is as frightening as possible. Jerome

Byrne as Herr Zeller is almost his equal with his stiff, regulated point of view about the rights of Nazis and the wrongs of his neighbors. Kassi McMillan give Frau Schmidt an understated resonance in her role as the housekeeper.



Eric Van Tiel; PhotoL Ann Kielbasa

As Captain Von Trapp Eric Van Tiel delivers a rightfully rigid performance that slowly mellows into a more likeable human being as love touches him and alters his character. He sings well, dances nicely and creates a realistic character from start to finish. You can almost feel the love exuding from his heart.

Director John Saunders has melded all of these characters (and more) seamlessly and the show profits from his vision and his control. He has made me like a show that, frankly, I had dismissed in the past. His design team have supported his vision and the results are transformative. I could almost believe I was in the Austrian Alps. Aliva Cross has created a beautiful set and Angela Carstensen has matched it with costumes that speak. Andrew Gmoser's perfect lighting design moves through the show seamlessly. Elizabeth McGuire's choreography does

what is needed every time.

It feels odd to me to recommend "The Sound of Music" but I have no real choice in the matter. The show has come back to me in perfect form and it should do the same for you. This is one of the best of the season. . .anywhere.

+ 07/21/2023 +

The Sound of Music plays at the Mac-Haydn Theatre, 1925 Route 203, Chatham, NY through July 30. For information and tickets call 518-392-9292 or go on line to machaydntheatre.org.

