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Theater In Review

By MICHAEL L. BEEBE

In a survey last year Little Theatre of Jamestown members indicated their preference in theater to be entertainment and the current production at the East Second Street theater gives them exactly what they were asking for.

"Showboat" opened Friday and three hours later closed the night with a standing ovation as the audience brought the cast of 70 back for repeated curtain calls.

Based on life on a riverboat, the show depicts the Cotton Blossom, which travels up and down the Mississippi giving skits and songs to the townspeople who come aboard.

More than water separates the lifestyles of the town and river folk as the players aboard the boat form a society apart from the post-Civil War world of land folk, evidenced by the attempt of a sheriff to arrest a light skinned black cast member married to a

white man.

The fantasy life of the showboat is difficult to recreate, especially for an audience today, but Little Theatre's use of a full stage orchestra, special lighting effects, and numerous sets and costumes adds to the re-creation brought about by the superb acting of the cast.

Michele Constantino plays the light-skinned girl, Julie, who before her ouster from the boat by outsiders, was the lead of the showboat performances.

Her beautifully clear voice is heard in the first act's "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," but her second half solo "Bill", is perhaps the finest piece of acting and singing in the entire production.

But it is hard to make such a claim against other performances in the production.

Douglas Williams, as Joe, who incredibly has never appeared on stage before, nearly stopped the show with applause following a rendition of "Ol' Man River." Mr. Williams has a bass that has to start out near his feet and is finally brought out with such feeling that it's almost as if each note is squeezed out by his upturned fists.

Joe's wife, Queenie, played by Diane Peterson, is also excellent as she joins with Joe, Julie and Magnolia in "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man."

Magnolia, played by Leslie Rohm, is the daughter of the

showboat captain, who takes over Julie's leading lady role when she leaves the boat.

She and her eventual husband, Gaylord Ravenol, played by Wayne Prittie, provide the vehicle for the plot, she is a convincing Southern belle, he a smooth riverboat type.

The musical follows their romance, break-up and eventual return through a variety of tunes, including "You are Love," "Only Make Believe," and "Why Do I Love You?"

Mrs. Rohm's operatic-like mezzo-soprano and Mr. Prittie's tenor combine perfectly and are joined by the entire ensemble in "Why Do I Love You?"

Comic relief is found throughout the performance by Capt. Andy and his wife (Harry Hall and Marge Broadhead), Rubberface (Samuel Paladino) and by a pair of backwoods type played superbly by Bill Blanchard and Jody Deem.

In the best tradition of Black Bart and Snidely Whiplash, Ren Perlee plays the dastardly Pete who tells the world of the riverboat's secrets.

Ellie and Frank (Suellen Northrup and Chuck Vazine) also add to the comic twist as a pair of "also-rans" convinced they should be playing the leading roles on the showboat.

Additional performances of "Showboat" are set for Tuesday through Sunday, curtain at 8:30 p.m. except Sunday's 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. performances.