

DEVILISH FUN

The national touring company of *Damn Yankees*, headed by Jerry Lewis, adds fire to the summer season

by Christopher Kamera

Start with a great Broadway show—a classic from the 1950s. Add a seasoned show-biz legend. Cast a hunky leading man and a tongue-in-cheek seductress, and musical comedy fans have the sparkling revival of *Damn Yankees*, due to arrive in the City of Roses at the end of July.

Show-biz insiders know there's no doubt about it—Jerry Lewis has sold his soul to the devil. How else can one explain how a show-biz veteran who's

Lola, also captured.

Director Jack O'Brien originally staged the show for the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego—illustrating again how important regional theater is to Broadway. O'Brien reworked the original script, adding topical one-liners and turning the show into a nostalgic return to the Eisenhower era of pink-and-turquoise kitchens. He shifted a few songs to tighten the show for the Broadway staging. The revival—headlining a TV personality in the Lola role—was a modest hit. Adding Lewis to the cast late in the run gave the show an extra boost in tourist ticket sales and turned it into a natural for a national, subscription-based tour.

For the tour, O'Brien has allowed Lewis one 10-minute stand-up comedy routine late in Act 2. The series of bad jokes (and a few funny ones) delight most of the audience—the reasoning here seems to be that people paid money to see Jerry Lewis be Jerry Lewis. It does, however, destroy the devil's one big song from the original show,

"Those Were the Good Old Days," one of the legendary "11 o'clock numbers" that Broadway buffs love.

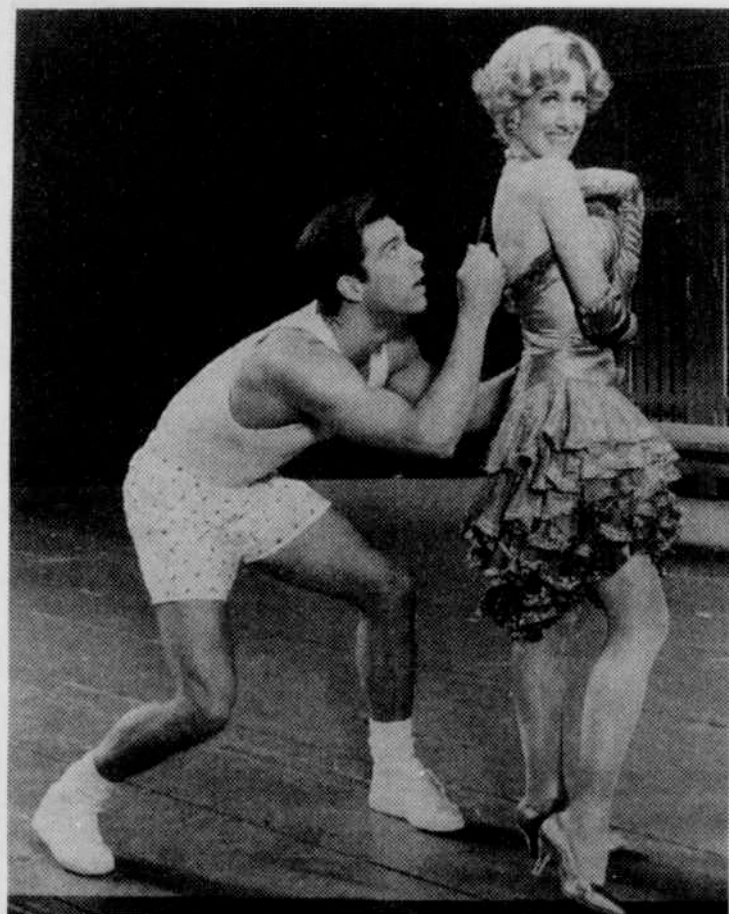
Damn Yankees was written by Richard Alder and Jerry Ross, the bright young men who had just given Broadway *The Pajama Game*, another smash hit. The legendary George Abbott helped write the script and directed the original staging. It's one of the last Broadway shows to share the spotlight with supporting and minor characters. When the plot starts to sag, the baseball team manager brings it to life with "Heart." Ditto the "Shoeless Joe from Hannibal,

Mo." production number from the exuberant female sports reporter. Add "Near to You," a poignant ballad in a cleverly staged trio by the elder Joe, the young Joe and the middle-aged wife. And, of course, "The Game" is a wonderful comic sequence that shows what the boys in the locker room really have on their minds. And it ain't always baseball.

This '90s *Damn Yankees* is a bright, affectionate, neon-colored return to one of Broadway's classic musical comedies. Gay and lesbian stage fans will find some clever in-jokes amid the updatings: In one, the devil details the great lovers cooling their heels in Limbo, noting that he's "just waiting for J. Edgar and Clyde."

The show is a campy outing right from the start—during the spirited overture, the conductor turns to the audience just as the orchestra moves into the Latin-flavored "Whatever Lola Wants" and reveals his baton clenched between his teeth as though it were the stereotypical rose. Even the curtain calls find the cast in new costumes and one unexpected final finale. *Damn Yankees* is a cheery, fun show—a perfect highlight for a summer outing.

Tickets for *Damn Yankees* are available at the PCPA box office at 1111 SW Broadway, from all G.I. Joe's TicketMaster outlets, or charge by phone at 224-4400. Discounted group rates are offered, call 299-4095 for details. The show is the fifth in the Dan Bean Presents the US Bank Broadway Series.



David Elder and Valerie Wright

been out of the limelight for nearly three decades can make his Broadway debut at the age of 69 and be greeted with standing ovations each night. On top that, Lewis, now in his early 70s, actually gives a solid performance as the devil in the touring edition of *Damn Yankees*, which arrives for an eight-performance run at Portland's Civic Auditorium from July 30 to Aug. 4.

Make no mistake about it—as polished a pro as Lewis is, he's never going to be a Broadway star based on acting talent. No, his successful performance as Mr. Applegate is a combination of entertainment myth, longevity, nostalgia and the pure fun of seeing someone famous "live and in person." But without the star power of Lewis, or someone like him, there probably wouldn't be a touring edition of the recent Broadway revival. And that would be a shame.

Damn Yankees, celebrating its 40th anniversary, is still one of Broadway's sharpest musicals. It won eight Tony Awards when it opened, including the coveted slot as Best Musical. It has always had a sparkle about it—a classic comic seduction number in the sizzling "Whatever Lola Wants," fun male-chorus struttings, a couple of sweet ballads and a string of great novelty numbers.

The real stars of the touring *Damn Yankees* are the young Joe Hardy and Lola, the devil's reluctant assistant. And that's how it should be. Applegate, after all, is a supporting character, although the role won Broadway awards for Ray Walston, who transferred his work to the screen version in 1957 and established his career before television lured him away. For this mounting, the producers have a hunky Joe, the handsome David Elder, and a splendid Lola, Valerie Wright. Both do outstanding work and arrive with numerous Broadway, television and film credits. Elder could easily work as a male model, and the production makes sure that he takes his shirt off every now and then. He plays the wonderful "Whatever Lola Wants" number in boxer shorts and a tight athletic shirt—his attempts to get his pants on become part of the choreography in this Act 1 smash finale.

Wright has the just-right combination of seductress and satirist to make Lola come to life. She's a great dancer, a fine comedienne and a strong singer. She keeps her tongue planted firmly in cheek, giving her stereotypical character a satirical edge that Gwen Verdon, the original

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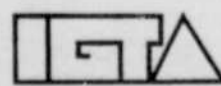
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