



HEAR THE BEAT OF DANCING FEET

42nd Street hoofs its way to the Hult

In the depths of the Great Depression, screwball musicals — both staged and on film — buoyed spirits with their vaudevillian charm.

The most famous of 'em all, *42nd Street*, tapdances its way to the Hult Center Nov. 3-4. The Tony-winning musical is based on the 1932 tell-all novel by former Broadway dancer Bradford Ropes (which reads like a deliciously salacious gossip rag) and subsequent 1933 film by genius director-choreographer Busby Berkeley, whose work invariably featured large-scale kaleidoscopic numbers with scads of showgirls moving in intricate geometric patterns.

Full disclosure: I love this musical. In 1980, when the original Broadway version was first produced by David Merrick, with direction and dances by Gower Champion, I was 9, and my extremely hip music teacher, Kathy Pengelly, taught us all the songs from the breakout hit.

Kathy also encouraged a few of us to audition for the nascent University of Oregon Children's Choir, and rather than prepare a ubiquitous tune like "Where Is Love?" or "Edelweiss," this Broadway baby sang the opening number from *42nd Street*, because it was, and still is, awesome:

In the heart of little old New York,
You'll find a thoroughfare.
It's the part of little old New York
That runs into Times Square.
A crazy quilt that "Wall Street Jack" built,
If you've got a little time to spare,
I want to take you there.

Come and meet those dancing feet,
On the avenue I'm taking you to...
Forty-Second Street!

In fact, I'm hard-pressed to write anything at all now, without first pausing to sing a few bars (OK, all) of this torch song to my dogs, who seem oddly disinterested.

42nd Street tells the story of a starry-eyed young dancer named Peggy Sawyer, who leaves her Allentown, Pennsylvania home for New York City, to audition for the new Broadway musical *Pretty Lady*. When the leading lady breaks her ankle, Peggy takes over and becomes a star.

(Not unlike me, nailing my audition and landing a coveted spot among the choir's first sopranos.)

The current *42nd Street* is directed by Mark Bramble and choreographed by Randy Skinner, the team that staged the 2001 revival. And unlike the 1980 production that borrowed its look from the gritty Warner Brothers' movie, today's scenic design by Beowulf Boritt traces its inspiration to the MGM Technicolor aesthetic:

"This touring production is a musical comedy motion picture in living color," Bramble says.

The show features some heavyweights from the Great American Songbook, including "We're in the Money" (1933), "Lullaby of Broadway" (1935), "Shuffle off to Buffalo" (1933), "Dames" (1934), "I Only Have Eyes For You" (1934) and, of course, "42nd Street."

"We've just been through a terrible recession that we seem to be coming out of, and *42nd Street* speaks to that," Bramble says. "When can you not use an optimistic message? It's also an American Dream story, and people like that. They want that. The show makes you feel good. You root for this girl from Allentown to succeed."

42nd Street comes to Eugene 7:30 pm Tuesday and Wednesday, Nov. 3-4, at the Hult Center; \$33-\$88. Tickets are available at the Hult Center Ticket Office, BroadwayinEugene.com or by calling the Hult Center box office at 682-5000.

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