



STEPHANIE PHILO
NEWMAN IN
COTTAGE THEATRE'S
PRODUCTION OF
ANNIE GET YOUR GUN

HER AIM IS TRUE

Cottage Theatre hits the bull's-eye with Irving Berlin's classic musical Annie Get Your Gun

It's not necessarily downbeat to claim that a given theatrical production is completely carried by one performance in particular — to lavish praise on an actor who puts the play on her back and carts it expertly and, of equal importance, joyously from her first appearance on stage to the proverbial drop of the velvet curtain.

This is especially true in community theater, a distinctly democratic institution where the egalitarian instinct gives a nudge to tender swaths of talent that blend in a stew of ability, some of it realized but not always.

Which brings us to Stephanie Philo Newman's turn as Annie Oakley in Cottage Theatre's current production of *Annie Get Your Gun*. Newman, who teaches theater arts at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, inhabits her role with such sassy aplomb that she elevates this Irving Berlin classic into the realm of triumph.

Channeling such legends as Ethel Merman, Mae West and Irene Dunne, Newman gives her Oakley just the right combination of hayseed charm, frontier grit and bubbling sex appeal; her performance is at once orthodox and utterly modern, a nod to the tradition and continuing relevance of musical theater.

Whether flirting with her gun-slinging foil Frank Butler (the well-matched Ward Fairbain) or proving her worth as a tough woman capable of competing in a man's world, Newman exhibits the kind of lost-art versatility that made Broadway the toast of the world: She can sing, dance, make funny, pitch woo and kick ass with the best of them.

As great as Newman is, it's not as though the rest of the large cast scrambles to keep up; rather, her infectious spirit seems to provide the necessary spark, spreading a sort of giddy atmosphere throughout the production. Tony Rust, who directs, shows a real facility for such traditional fare, giving the show a rapid clip that does honor to the lickety-split comedy of mid-century musicals. Just the tap routine is worth the price of admission.

It must be said that, as a fictionalized account of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show that first hit the stage in 1946, *Annie Get Your Gun* (despite getting an update in 1999) does contain outdated portrayals of Native Americans, especially in the person of Chief Sitting Bull (Dale Flynn). This is not a trigger warning but instead a preventative plea against the sort of reactive crap that throws the baby out with the bathwater.

To whit: You are entirely free to reject and revile this show, which, yes, trucks in fanciful period stereotypes, but in so doing you may be participating in a bit of bourgeois entitlement that perpetuates injustice in the act of negating it. I suggest, instead, that you pay attention to these stereotypes, which often contain a devious and undermining critique of the systems that give rise to them. ■

Annie Get Your Gun is playing now through May 1 at Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove; \$20-\$25, tickets at cottage theatre.org or 942-8001.

(SUB)URBAN PROJECTIONS

APRIL 21-22

DIGITAL ART & MEDIA FESTIVAL

AT THE HULT CENTER

APRIL 21

Ritual

Free (Pre-order tickets)

Music, performance, art & technology collide in this immersive experience in the Hult Center lobby. Over 60 artists collaborating.

Pick your start time and pre-order free tickets:
8:00, 8:30, 9:00, 9:30

APRIL 22

Kid Koala's Nufonia Must Fall

Tickets from \$26

Robot puppets, turntables, string quartet...and romance. Kid Koala's graphic novel comes to life filmed in realtime on stage. Stick around for the afterparty.

Show Starts at 8:00 pm

Get your tickets at
HultCenter.org

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