



Theater review: 'Oh, Coward!' full of wit, jolly music, beautiful voices

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By **Carol Wells, Special to The Oregonian**

Seeing "Oh, Coward!" prompts the awareness that our modern sense of "seen it all" ironic detachment is missing one important element: fun. The English writer, composer, and performer Noël Coward, whose work this play celebrates, is no stranger to the cutting remark nor the sneer. But all that swagger is shot through with a keen awareness of the silliness of it all.

Take, for instance, his plea to an overbearing mother:

Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs. Worthington

Don't put your daughter on the stage

She's a bit of an ugly duckling,

You must honestly confess

And the width of her seat

Would surely defeat

Her chances of her success.

The music is jolly, the language is masterful and the payoff is perfection. The Lakewood Theatre Company has produced the musical revue in a cabaret setting with the audience seated at tables (food and wine are offered for sale) at its smaller Side Door stage. Selected works are presented, including snippets from Coward's plays, by three actors in evening dress who strike poses with cigarettes in long holders, properly roll their r's ("brrright young things") and deliver marvelous entertainment.

In addition to acting, these performers must sing beautifully in a variety of styles

"Oh,

and knock off a witticism or two, and director Steve Knox has chosen an eminently suitable cast to fill the roles. The sole woman, Lauri Jones, has a voice with an emotional range that goes easily from a lilting number about the cheerful nature of the British to a moving 1941 song, "London Pride," that celebrates the city's history and resilience.

Performer Jeremy Southard plays his character with the air of a gentleman of refinement who prides himself on his benign tolerance for the little men around him, and this attitude is showcased well in songs such as "Why Do the Wrong People Travel?" ("What explains this mass mania/to leave Pennsylvania/And clack around like flocks of geese/Demanding dry martinis on the isles of Greece?")

Tim Smith has a slight edge over the other performers in that he looks so like an English snob. His stature is tall and his features are chiseled. Add the highbrow tilt of the chin, the on-target accent, and the studied, affected mannerisms to equal a character who looks perfectly natural lounging in a maroon silk dressing gown.

Charismatic musical director Stephen Alexander, who also accompanies each number on an often rollicking piano, has himself, David Duthie on bass, and the other three performers working together as smoothly as a lick of butter cream frosting.

Coward!"

When: 7 p.m.
Friday-Saturday

Where: Side Door
Stage, Lakewood
Center for the Arts,
368 S. State St.,
Lake Oswego

Tickets: \$20,
503-635-3901 or
lakewood-
center.org

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