

[theatre]

Theatre by the Sea gets *Dirty*

by Jim Seavor

Fess up. You know you love scoundrels - as long as they're loveable or, at the very, least likeable.

To find them this summer, look no farther than Theatre by the Sea. The stage teems with *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* - the kind of rogues you enjoy spending time with, though probably don't want to take home.

The action takes place on the French Riviera, where the palm trees sway and the tourists' pockets seem ripe for the picking. Every handful of money or jewels has another hand waiting to take it.

Lawrence Jameson (played by Al Bundonis) exudes charm and poise as a phony prince, drawing women to him like bears to honey. But having been around a while, he has lost the thrill of the

DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS

Theatre by the Sea
in Matunuck
Runs thru Sept. 6
www.theatrebythesea.com

chase. Life is getting dull.

That ends when he meets Freddy Benson (Jason Gillman). Benson, a small-time con man so rough around the edges that he barely has edges, is nevertheless shrewd. Soon Jameson begins to see himself as a Henry Higgins figure. Where Higgins turned a flower girl into a lady, Jameson thinks he can turn Benson into a smooth pro.

He forgets the warning contained in Hammerstein's lyric (in a much different musical): "by your students you'll be taught."

The plan goes well until both Benson and Jameson begin

falling for the same woman. You got it, complications.

As Jameson, Bundonis has "suave" down pat. Tall and elegant, the picture of romantic propriety, he knows the way to a woman's heart and purse. And his voice is strong and sure.

Jason Gillman plays his opposite, for whom a successful con yields \$20. And Gillman is apparently made of rubber. He's a great physical clown and plays off and with Bundonis beautifully. Whether a mad member of a royal family or a veteran confined to a wheel chair, he goes all out without upstaging his more reserved elder.

They make a great team.

Lisa Yuen, familiar as Rachael on "All My Children," plays the woman of Jameson and Benson's dreams. Her strong, clear voice perfectly suits songs like "Here I Am" and the rest of the David



Yazbek score, most of which aims for laughs. Yuen pairs her vocal chops with great comic timing, and she pulls heartstrings like the best musical comedy stars.

Andre Thibault (Christopher Swan) captivates as a police chief and aide to Jameson. He finds true love (or lust) with Muriel Eubanks, a perpetually on-the-prowl traveler played by Stacey Geer.

Theatre by the Sea gives *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* the customary sheen. The spot-on scenery of Ray Recht frames the stage with

giant palm trees and places enough rooms in the hotel to keep the backstage crew busy. There's even a quick visit to Oklahoma - don't ask. I won't tell why.

The often jewel-bedecked costumes of Marcia Zammarelli provide enough glitter to brighten any day.

And the orchestra provides a rich, strong sound.

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels closes Theatre By the Sea's season with an evening that doesn't take itself too seriously- and won't let you do so either.

[theatre]

E.P. Community Theatre heads *Into the Woods*

by Robert Barossi

According to Carly Romano, Resident Artistic Director of East Providence Community Theatre, "Fairy tales have always been entertaining, but they also teach us very important things that transcend time and country." She hopes that audiences will agree when they see the company's upcoming production of *Into The Woods*.

Romano's involvement with East Providence Community Theatre began when the group did, six seasons ago. She has worn multiple hats there, including Director/Choreographer, co-founder and president.

INTO THE WOODS

East Providence Community
Held at E.P. Recreation Center
Auditorium Theatre
Runs Aug. 20-22
www.eptheatre.org

"As a group we try to fulfill our roles and go beyond them," she says, adding that it makes the work easier if everyone participating is well-rounded.

Credit for selecting the show goes to Music Director Alex Tirrell.

"He said that it was fun, witty, and had giants and Brothers Grimm characters, and everyone really took to it," Romano says. "When we thought about it though, and how tough the show

could be in every aspect, I think I did a double take and set out to make sure we could accomplish it magnificently."

Romano believes that anyone familiar with fairy tales will recognize the stories and characters brought to life in *Into the Woods*. In preparation, she "researched every fairy tale that was on a character from the show, which was amazing." She was delighted to find so many versions of traditional tales like *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

"Peasants were telling variations of *Little Red Riding Hood* stories centuries ago in the fields as they worked, and from China came one of our first versions of *Cinderella*, way back in 860 AD,"

Romano says. "These stories are loved by all. We can relate to them and learn from them who we are and how we want to be treated even if, at times, life is difficult or frightening."

Bringing these tales to life requires some onstage magic and technical wizardry.

"I would say getting a person to fly is probably the biggest challenge, and [the] most interesting," Romano says. "The whole set is being taken care of by several groups of wonderful people, and we've been preparing for months."

Even more challenging than the technical elements is the music by Stephen Sondheim. Romano describes the score as "incredible but also incredibly

hard to wrap your mouth around."

She offers kudos to the actors, who she says are putting their skills to the test and trying as hard as they can while "still having fun working together on it."

The major message of the show, according to Romano, concerns the need to listen and learn.

"However, in the story the characters hardly listen and learn, and you can understand where their ordeals sprout from," she says.

Romano hopes the musical will remind audiences what it was like as children, hearing the fairy tales for the first time.

"I also hope that people take back a new perspective and really think about how they say things or what they do," she says.