

Getting Out

Greater Boston Stage Company's DAMES AT SEA a rollicking musical comedy spoof

By Sheila Barth

Spending two hours at Greater Boston Stage Company's super spoofy, happy-tappy musical, "Dames at Sea," provides a welcome respite to continuous frightening news about monster storms devastating the Caribbean islands and our Southern states, thus forcing mass evacuations. Helmed and choreographed by the theater's award-winning associate artistic director, Ilyse Robbins, veteran Boston star Shana Dirik and her five winsome co-stars - Ephie Aardema, Sara Coombs, Taavon Gamble, Russell Garrett and Michael Seltzer - mug it up, poking fun in this parody of the classic American musical Broadway show in its heyday and the 1930s Busby Berke-



ley-style romantic musicals. Those Broadway hits continue to delight theatergoers today. So do their parodies, providing chuckles, laughs and lots of fun. And "Dames at Sea" is no exception. Eric Levenson's set is mini-

malist. The musical accompaniment is, too; but the show sallies and sails forth, chugging along on an upbeat tempo. Accompanied by two on-stage pianists, (music director Steven Ladd Jones and Bethany Aiken), the ensemble

cast sings powerfully and tap-dances energetically throughout the 1-3/4 hour, two-act production. The first act gets off to a slow, and all-too-familiar start, but gains momentum, picking up steam throughout the second act, to the finale. Shana Dirik is terrific in her caricaturish role of Broadway veteran diva Mona, while Ephie Aardema beams as Ruby, Mona's foil - a fresh-faced, eager ingenue from Utah, who packed only her tap shoes in her suitcase, hoping to become a star on Broadway. While Mona is conniving and demanding, Ruby is innocently naive, her homespun demeanor endearing to the cast's characters and audiences. Aardema unleashes her lovely voice in romantic solos, "The Sailor of My

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Two-act musical comedy, romantic spoof, book, lyrics by George Haimsohn and Robin Miller, music by Jim Wise, appearing through September 24 at Stoneham Theatre, renamed Greater Boston Stage Company, 395 Main St., Stoneham: Wednesdays, Sundays, 2 p.m.; Thursdays, 7:30 p.m.; Fridays, 8 p.m.; Saturdays 3,8 p.m. \$50-\$60; seniors, \$45-\$55; students with valid ID, \$20. greaterbostonstage.org, 781-279-2200.

Dreams" and "Raining in My Heart;" and she and co-star Taavon Gamble emanate charming chemistry in duets, "It's You," and "There's Something About You". Portraying Joan, on-stage cast member and Ruby's new friend, Sara Coombs brightens numbers with her staccato tap-dancing and strong voice, especially during duet "Choo-Choo Honeymoon," with Michael Seltzer, Joan's altar-shy, sailor boyfriend, Lucky. Russell Garrett delivers comedic and musical support, too, in his roles of Hennessy, the on-stage show-within-show director and the sailors' battleship captain, who, coincidentally, is Mona's long-ago lover. The couple is a hoot in duet, "The Beguine". All ends well in this fast-paced, hummable, toe-tapping, light-hearted, happy-go-lucky musical.