

## **HTI Does Frank Perfectly: Loesser's show music is presented with affection**

**By Stewart Brown**

**The Hamilton Spectator**

**July 9, 1996**

If Frank Loesser had written only the music and lyrics for "Guys and Dolls", he'd still rank among the great music men of Broadway.

But Loesser was more.

In fact, the New York native wrote the words, music or both for 1,500 songs in a lifetime that ended at 59 in 1969.

"Perfectly Frank" is a snappy resume of 54 of them, packaged with affection, pride and good humour into a 90 minute show, plus intermission.

Hamilton Theatre Inc. uses this revue to showcase eight performers, most of whom haven't had any major musical theatre exposure.

But they all love to sing and there are some fine musical moments in solo, duet and ensemble, under the musical direction of pianist Anne Barnshaw.

Three of the cast – David Tello, Nathalie Pasche and the perky Tina Traini – sing with the Hamilton youth choir, Vox Nouveau. Tello and Jeanette Wilkinson both study vocal jazz at Humber College.

Lyla Miklos and Brian Gedcke have been in HTI cabaret and mainstage shows. Lorne Gretsinger is a Grmsby schoolteacher who's become a pleasant addition to the HTI scene. Zachary Browman is an intense young man from McMaster.

It's a mixed bag, strongest in song and a readiness to do or die for good old HTI. Movement and projection are things, one hopes, that will come with experience.

Anyway, "Perfectly Frank" sounds good and gives both cast and audience a chance to have fun reviewing Loesser's song bill.

It's an impressive collection of tunes from the hit shows – "Where's Charlie", "Guys and Dolls", "The Most Happy Fella" and "How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying" – with plenty more from lesser or plain-unknown shows.

That's the attraction of a revue such as this: the chance to discover new or almost forgotten songs.

Here, for instance, Browman offers an impassioned "Roseanna" from a show called "Roseanna McCoy".

Elsewhere, Gedcke and Miklos get frantic on the hepcat song, "Murder, He Says."

Both are part of a United States Overseas sequence, one of several nicely assembled by American writer Kenny Solms. All are presented on Tom Leveley's corner stage with its tiny-but-effective turntable.

Gedcke returns with the offbeat "Never Will I Marry" from "Greenwillow", then later joins Wilkinson and Gretsinger for some Damon Runyon local colour on "Fugue For Tinhorns".

I particularly like the way director Sharon Reynolds looks for humour in the routines. Faced with cast member Browman, who moves like an arthritic lumberjack, Reynolds incorporates his woodenness into the marching on "Praise The Lord and Pass The Ammunition", and everybody – audience included – feels more comfortable for it.

I like, too, the consistent attempt to sell each song in some dramatic context. At the end of the USO section, just by having Pasche embrace a tiny Union Jack, you know the reason "Spring Will Be A Little Late This Year" has everything to do with a boyfriend overseas.

Miklos is an effective comedienne, mugging through "Adelaide's Lament", then changing pace for a minor-key "Can't Get Out Of This Mood" for a blues section that includes the offbeat "Junkman" from Wilkinson.

Gretsinger surveys a ragtag "New Ashmoleon Marching Society", then returns with the soaring soprano voice of Pasche for a touching set from "The Most Happy Fella", serving notice it's maybe time the show was done again locally.

"Perfectly Frank" presents a rich variety of Loesser songs, some novel interpretations and a chance to see eight hard-working young performers on their way up. It's a pleasant way to spend a summer's night.