

Mooney Follies offers gala benefit performance

'Gotta Sing Gotta Dance' reviews musical eras and locales

By Kevin Myers

Audiences at this year's stagings of the Mooney Follies have been guided on a fantastic musical journey, touring from the rocky shores of the United States' eastern coastline to the sandy western beaches of the Pacific, through a variety of musical eras, from the honky-tonk of the roaring '20s and heart-warming Christmases of yesteryear to a sexy, contemporary rendition of Madonna's "Material Girl."

The social, religious and historical revue 'Gotta Sing Gotta Dance' is an original musical that flows gracefully from country-western clogging to the gospel sound of choral singing, all flavored with absurd humor.

A chorus representing three generations, and consisting of Cardinal Mooney students, alumni, parents and grandparents, makes its grand appearance in the first segment of the Follies. "Americana," a tribute to our national culture, includes components of Dixieland, country-Western and contemporary music. The sequence draws laughter from the audience — with such antics as debonaire cowboys riding toy horses — then switches to Lou Pereira's solemn rendition of Kenny Rogers' "The Gambler." Such classics as "Route 66" and "On Broadway" contrast with the 1960s ballad, "California Dreamin'."

With no break in the action, woolen sweaters and Christmas stockings replace plaid shirts and cowboy hats, and the comical James Allen Hitzke glides onto the stage for a song-and-dance routine as Frosty the Snowman. Later, three rag dolls spin out to "Syncopated Clock." Then a battalion of wooden soldiers marched in the "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers." Their formation is tumbled, however, by Chuck LaGaipa as the unsyncopated soldier.

Characteristic of the show, just as humor peaks, the mood turns tranquil. The parade of soldiers is followed by a representation of Mary and Joseph, cradling the baby Jesus as the chorus sings "What Child is This."

The third segment of the performance "The Promise of Our Time," touches upon the true meaning of brotherly love, and challenges the performers with an unfamiliar style of music, choral and gospel singing. "One of the reasons we had 'The Promise of Our Time' theme was to expand our musical styles to include choral singing," said Barbara Dill, musical director and performer.

Setting the mood for this segment was the voice of piano-player Jack Fiannaca, singing "He Ain't Heavy ... He's My Brother." Roxann Duemmel concluded the segment with "You'll Never Walk Alone" as the curtains closed.

In the final segment, "Cocktails at Eight," the stage became a ritzy cabaret that hosted a rather unlikely company. The Razzle Dazzle Dancers opened the nightclub act on a sexy, sophisticated note, but three routines later the mood turned to flash as a chorus of male characters dressed in drag took over the stage to sing "Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend." Soon after, a couple of dreaming



Lou Pereira and Lisa Swiatek add a flourish to the end of "Play Me Some Mountain Music" in the first act of the Mooney Follies production of "Gotta Sing Gotta Dance".



In her rendition of "Looking For Love" Beth Anne Frank sashays across the stage as members of the men's chorus try to impress her.



Chuck LaGaipa solos in "My Kind Of Town."

hobos stumbled in off the street, dancing to "We're a Couple of Swells."

The Thursday, Nov. 14, performance partially benefited the School of the Holy Childhood, and a wine-and-cheese reception followed the show. Since the inception of the Follies nine years ago, all proceeds have been used to help offset Cardinal Mooney tuition. "But this year we wanted to create an alliance with a group that sincerely needed funds," said Pat Cossaboon, director of publicity for the Follies.

"We all have children or relatives that have children in the Holy Childhood School," said Lana Momano, coordinator and creator of the gala charity performance. Ginny Probst, producer of the Follies for the

past nine years, explained the Holy Childhood's special need for donations. With its distinction as a school for the handicapped, "even if the students aren't able to meet tuition charges, they (Holy Childhood) don't turn them away," she said.

Although the special gala performance marks the Follies' first formal effort to provide funds for a secondary cause in addition to its primary goal, it is not the first time Follies casts have assembled to benefit organizations other than Mooney. After the Follies have officially ended, casts have offered special presentations for various charitable groups. This year, the cast will be performing shows at nursing homes on December 1, and at the Island Valley

Country Club, December 8, to benefit the Kidney Foundation.

The Follies began nine years ago as a possible remedy to Mooney's severe budget crunch. As an alternative to slashing such programs as school lunches, the school faculty developed the idea of presenting a play to limit rising tuition costs. But the play that evolved into the annual Follies was canceled on its first performance because of the 1977 energy crisis. The following year the play was not canceled, and the Follies as it is known today began.

Tickets, \$5 at the door, are still available for remaining performances on Friday, Nov. 22, and Saturday, Nov. 23, both at 8 p.m.



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