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By [Jessica Santina](#)

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One of my favorite things about live theater is how it transports me to another time and place. I especially love stories set in the past, during times I—perhaps naively—idealize as being innocent and carefree—long before 2019 had a chance to crap all over everything.

For a touch of nostalgia and a fun escape, Sierra School of Performing Arts' production of *Guys and Dolls* fits the bill "Nicely-Nicely."

Dubbed by many as the greatest musical of all time, *Guys and Dolls* features some of today's most beloved show tunes, including "Luck Be a Lady" and "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat." It's set in Manhattan, at a time that's hard to pinpoint; it's based on Damon Runyon's short stories about gangsters and gamblers in the '20s and '30s, but the girls dancing in poodle skirts throw that timeline into question.

As the story opens, hustler Nathan Detroit (Kirk Gardner) and his band of crony gamblers—Nicely-Nicely Johnson (Mark Calise), Benny Southstreet (Christopher Fesenmaier) and Rusty Charlie (Daniel Shaver)—bemoan the lack of places in which to hold their illegal floating crap game. One garage looks like a good option, but its owner wants \$1,000.

Nathan's old gambling pal, Sky Masterson (Jeff Chamberlain), is willing to bet on anything. Nathan bets \$1,000 that Sky can't convince a girl—of Nathan's choosing, of course—to fly to Havana for dinner. Knowing the pious Sarah Brown (Alexa Bernal) of the city's Save-a-Soul Mission would never accompany Sky on such an unvirtuous mission, Nathan figures he's got the bet—and the garage for his crap game—all locked up. What he doesn't count on is Sky's talent for smooth talking.

Nathan has another problem. His fiancée of 14 years, Miss Adelaide (Sophie Moeller), a showgirl, is sick of waiting for Nathan to give up the gambling and marry her already—literally sick of it. Now both Nathan and Sky, always used to calling the shots, are about to get what's coming to them from a pair of "dolls" they've sorely underestimated.

Bernal and Moeller totally steal the show—something they tend to do in every show. Moeller, in fact, is fresh off her role as Norma in Brūka Theatre's *Victor/Victoria*, a character who bears an uncanny resemblance to Miss Adelaide; here again, she lights up the stage. Bernal, whom I last saw in TMCC Performing Arts' *The Producers*, is not only a stunning beauty, but her comedic talents and singing ability make an unstoppable combination.

As Sky, the gambler with a heart of gold, Chamberlain conveys both a tough guy exterior and a romantic soul, and he and Bernal have true chemistry together.

Sierra School of Performing Arts does plenty right, from strong lead actors to gorgeous costuming and a live orchestra, all in a gorgeous outdoor venue. (Bring a blanket—it gets chilly!) Although the singers are, at times, uneven and ill-suited to their songs, and despite some technical glitches (the outdoor performance relies on microphones), *Guys and Dolls* is undeniably a marvelous way to spend an evening.



Sierra School for Performing Arts will stage *Guys and Dolls* through August 24. Sierra School of Performing Arts presents *Guys and Dolls*, music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, and directed by Janet Lazarus, at the Robert Z. Hawkins Amphitheater, Bartley Ranch Regional Park, 6000 Bartley Ranch Road, on Aug. 16-18, 22-24 at 7:30 p.m. \$15-\$45. For tickets or more information, visit [guysandollsiro.com](#) or call 852-7740.

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