Worth the gamble
by Jessica Santina

This article was published on 08.15.19.

One of my favorite things about live theater is how it transports me to another time and place. I especially love shows set in the past, during times I—and perhaps many—believe to be 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 did the bill “Nicely-Nicely.”

Dubbed by many as the greatest musical of all time, Guys and Dolls is based on Damon Runyon’s short stories about gamblers 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 pugilist looks like a good option, but in reality wanes $3,000.

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 Gardner) would never accompany Sky on such a sin-stained mission, Nathan figures he’s got the bet. But the pinoys and the garage for the 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. So she puts $1,000 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 Sky, the gambler with a heart of gold, Chamberlain conveys both a tough guy exterior and a romantic soul, and he and Bernal tend to do in every show. Moeller, in fact, is fresh off her role as Norma in Brüka Theatre’s The Producers.

For a touch of nostalgia and a fun escape, 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 Joe Swerling and Abe Burrows, and directed by Janet Lazarus, at the Robert J. Hillman 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 guysanddollsrn.com or call 775-7740.