

## THE SOUND OF MUSIC at Maine State Music Theatre

by Melissa M. Orth, *The Bangor Daily News*

“The hills are alive ...”

Wait. There aren’t any hills in Brunswick, but what the town is fortunate to have is the Maine State Music Theatre, a blessing made evident by the company’s return after two COVID-constricted seasons. MSMT triumphantly reopened the Pickard Theater doors this month with its revival of “The Sound of Music.”

Who needs hills amid the return of drills, thrills, trills, and playbills?

“The Sound of Music,” not seen at MSMT since 2000, delivers comfort and familiarity. It is a wise choice to entice theatergoers to the velvet seats. Few people have never seen the show or movie, and fewer still can refrain from humming along to the beloved songs that include “Do Re Mi” and “My Favorite Things”. Though one could easily argue that the Academy’s Best Picture award winner is the much more commonly viewed version of “The Sound of Music,” the film and Broadway musical share nearly identical scenes with few minor exceptions.

For those who did not grow up with the annual Sunday night movie, the plot centers on a young postulant named Maria who leaves convent life to serve as governess to widower Captain Von Trapp’s seven children, ranging in age from 16 to 5. Despite pranks and some head-butting with the captain, Maria quickly adapts and flourishes in her new position, gaining the children’s respect and adoration.

Meanwhile the captain is in need of a wife and mother for his children. Could he see Maria as more than a governess or will he commit to a marriage of wealth and convenience with Baroness Elsa? Will Maria return to convent life or will the 1938 Anschluss affect their lives?

As fresh and wholesome as a newly picked alpine strawberry, MSMT’s production of this classic Rodgers & Hammerstein musical is family friendly, with a notable spotlight on the Von Trapp children who are onstage for much of the show. Whether or not director Marc Robin intentionally decided to have the youngest actors appear more often than scripted benefits the overall experience. Casting director Bob Cline struck gold finding seven talented – and several local – singers to play the Von Trapp children.

Every time Portland first grader Josie Marzilli steps on stage as little Gretl, all eyes shift to her and not just because of her striking red hair. She valiantly and adorably fought sleep to deliver a final solo more than two hours into the Thursday evening performance. Brunswick sixth grader Gregory Trapp, Jr. (any relation to the family?) as younger son Kurt gives a strong vocal performance. Keep an eye on him. And Kate Walters as Birgitta steal scenes in offering the necessary sardonic wit to counter the show’s sweetness. She effortlessly delivers comedic lines and collects the laughs.

Equally wide-eyed and dewy is the magnificent Hanley Smith as Maria. She plays the young woman with a believable blend of naivete and a keen understanding of human

nature, especially when it comes to relating to the children. Smith's expressive voice has the flexibility and range for the role and her tone blends magnificently with the gorgeous rich fullness of Will Ray's timbre when Maria and the captain sing together. Beth Kirkpatrick portrays the necessary sympathetic yet stern demeanor as Mother Abbess.

Blake Hammond seemingly walked right out of Hollywood central casting circa 1939 to play Max, the ambitious yet lovable concert promoter who is transparent in his "looking out for himself" attitude. And Katie Sina exudes 1930s chic as the rich widow who has her eyes on the captain and his mansion. Sina and Hammond need a bit more interaction when they sing the duet, "How Can Love Survive?" but their chemistry shines in the jibes and quips that are as snappy as in any classic found on TCM.

Anthony Lascoskie Jr. as costume designer and new staff person Kevin Koski as costume coordinator created a high society party scene in Act 2 that perfectly captures the styles of the time. Less successful and accurate are Maria's costumes, specifically her shoes, but the anachronisms are punchlines so this quibble can be overlooked.

Scenic designer Michael Schweikardt invites the audience into a peaceful space of comfort and reflection in the opening scene which comprises a convent filled with dark wooden arches and flickering candlelight illuminating the nuns' evensong. Much later, a simple yet effectively chilling scene dressing of a microphone flanked by the large red banners featuring the Nazi symbol shatters that peace toward the end of the show. But when Will Ray steps into the spotlight and sings the lullaby "Edelweiss" into that mic, the chill turns to warmth thanks to Ray's voice and Paul Black's lighting design.

Being a part of the audience, seeing "The Sound of Music" live and in person while surrounded by people who know and love the story of free-spirited Maria, helps one feel like part of society again. Whether you have seen "The Sound of Music" once or 100 times, it is well worth leaving the house, putting on a mask (or not, as it is not required but most people were wearing them), and shelling out the ticket price to see the Maine State Music Theatre's production and support local theater.

"The Sound of Music" runs June 8 – June 25. For more information, visit <https://msmt.org/the-sound-of-music/>