

Player's Club Scores Bull's Eye With 'Annie Get Your Gun'

By Margie Royal

Although I was familiar with many of Irving Berlin's classic theater songs from *Annie Get Your Gun*, I had never seen the show staged. So it was with great anticipation that I went to see the Players Club of Swarthmore Theater production, now playing through Dec. 16. I am happy to say that under the sure direction of Bruce Warren, the talented cast does a great job with this Broadway

classic. The show, with book by Broadway greats Herbert and Dorothy Fields, is based on the life of the legendary Annie Oakley and her rivalry/romance with fellow sharpshooter Frank Butler.

The show opens with the curtain closed and Frank Butler (Tom Orr) singing a few refrains of "There's No Business Like Show Business". Orr's looks, wonderful voice and stage presence make him terrific casting for the role.

It's believable that Annie would fall head-heels-in-love with him the moment that she meets him.

When the curtain opens, the 29-member company joins in singing "There's No Business Like Show Business" as they portray members of Buffalo Bill's Wild West traveling troupe and the Cincinnati towns people the troupe will entertain. The large ensemble includes many teens from area high schools including Penncrest and Strath Haven and they add greatly to the fun of watching the Player's Club production.

To drum up business for his show, Buffalo Bill and his business manager Charlie Davenport (well played by Bob Dimond and Ben Fried, respectively) announce a challenge: \$100 to a town member who can outshoot their star performer Frank Butler.

Of course, that town member is Annie Oakley (Faith Yesner). Yesner does a great job portraying Annie's earthiness and lack of polish combined with a warm heart and honest nature. Yesner quick-

ly makes the audience like her and root for her success. Annie arrives in town with the young siblings she has been left to care for: Nellie (Amy Bartlett), Jessie (Emilie Reimer) and Little Jake (Connor Ambrose). The money the shooting match would bring would feed them all so Annie agrees to compete.

Of course, her shooting is brilliant, hurting Frank's ego and hurting the chance of romance between them. Annie is offered a job with Buffalo Bill's troupe and the rest of Act One shows her rising fame and growing attraction to Frank Butler. That attraction makes her an enemy. Dolly Tate (Mary Filippone) also has her eye on Frank and is jealous of Annie. Filippone shines in the role of the man-hungry and conniving Dolly.

The marvelous songs in Act One include "There's No Business Like Show Business," "Doin' What Comes Natur'ly," "The Girl That I Marry," "You Can't Get A Man With A Gun", "They Say It's Wonderful" and "Moonshine Lullaby".

Act Two brings a few reprises along with the lovely ballads "I Got Lost In His Arms" sung by Annie and "Who Do You Love, I Hope" sweetly performed by Na-



Buffalo (Bob Dimond) welcomes Annie Oakley (Faith Yesner) to his Wild West Show as manager Charlie Davenport (Ben Fried) and star-sharpshooter Frank Butler (Tom Orr) look on.

talee Beth Hill and Penncrest's Bradley King. Also in Act Two are the hit tunes "I Got The Sun In the Morning" and "Anything You Can Do."

A five-member band accompanies the singers.

Greg Miller's set cleverly accommodates the many locales of Annie's journey.

Choreographer Debra Yemenjian stages the musical numbers, and costumer Ethel Guy does a bravo job costuming the large cast. Many of Annie's costumes are gorgeous, especially her end-of Act One outfit and many of the ensembles she wears in Act Two. Buffalo Bill's crisp white suit, Frank Butler's gold and silver fes-

tooned shirts and the costumes for the ensemble which range from western wear to New York City ballgowns are all attractive and well chosen.

Player's Club hits the bull's eye with this production; so go and have a good time!

Remaining performances are Dec. 7-10 and Dec. 14-16. Thursday, Friday and Saturday performances are at 8p.m. and Sunday matinees are at 2 p.m.

The Players Club of Swarthmore is at 614 Fairview Avenue in Swarthmore. Tickets are \$22 for adults and \$10 for students (18 and under or college students with ID). For tickets, call 610-328-4271 or reserve at www.pcstheater.org.

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Special Guest **Tinker Bell**

The BFG Is Big Friendly Fun

By Christina Perryman

Children beware lest you are not "snatched" from your bed and taken to Arden Theatre Company's production of *The BFG* (*Big Friendly Giant*), written by Roald Dahl and adapted by David Wood.

The *BFG* tells the story of the orphan Sophie (wonderfully played by Maggie Lakis) and her adventures in Giant Land. One night, Sophie is snatched from her bed after spying a giant walking the streets outside her orphanage. Little does Sophie know her journey to Giant Country will test her courage, spark her creativity and prove to her that not all giants are evil, children-eating beasts. And with the likes of Meatdrinker (Kala Moses Baxter), Bonecruncher (Jared Michael Delaney), Bloodbottler (Ben Dibble), Gizzardgulper (Miriam Hyman), Childchewer (Catharine Slusar) and Fleshlumppeater (Jeb Kreager) on the loose, it's no wonder Sophie begins her adventure with a giant fear.

When Sophie emerges

from the giant's cloak, she finds herself in a cave with a creature unlike any she's met before... The BFG (Big Friendly Giant), masterfully played by Peter Pryor. Together, Sophie and The BFG learn to trust each other and realize that size isn't as important as you would think (The BFG and his preference for veggies over children cause the other giants to bully the "runt").

This play is a delight to both children and adults alike. Excellently directed by Whit MacLaughlin, spectators travel along with Sophie and The BFG to Giant Country, the land of dreams and finally to Buckingham Palace. Puppet Designer Aaron Cromie masterfully crafted the frightening masks for the giants as well as puppets for Sophie, the Queen of England (Ms. Slusar), the Head of Air Force (Delaney) and the Head of Army (Dibble). These puppets look so much like their portrayals, particularly the Sophie puppet, that it is easy to believe the puppets are alive and giants really exist.

All the actors were wonderful, easily transitioning from character to character, from "human land" to "giant land." Ms. Lakis does an ex-



Peter Pryor and Catharine K. Slusar in Arden Theatre Company's production of *The BFG* (*Big Friendly Giant*).

Photo by Mark Garvin.

cellent job with her Sophie puppet, Pryor is hilarious as the BFG and Ms. Slusar portrays the Queen of England perfectly. Ms. Baxter, Delaney, Dibble, Ms. Hyman and Kreager play giants anyone would tremble to meet in a dark alley or outside a bedroom window. Scenic Designer Lewis Folden and Costume Designer Richard St.Clair did an excellent job with setting the stage for this big adventure.

The BFG (*Big Friendly Giant*) runs through Jan. 21 at the Arden Theatre, 40 N. 2nd Street, Old City, Philadelphia. Tickets are \$14-\$30 and there is not a bad seat in the theater. After each show, there is a Q&A with the actors and actresses and the show is best for children age five and up. For tickets, call 215-922-1122 or visit www.ardentheatre.org.

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