

Lights go out but show goes on: 'Dames at Sea' an electrifying hit

STAGE REVIEW

By **JULE WIND**
For The Maui News

'Dames at Sea" safely launched the new Professional Artists of the Pacific's dream ship of a musical dinner theater on Maui Thursday night, despite a technological glitch that threatened to sink the sailing of this spirited production.

Producers Doug Kendrick and Jonathan Lehman had promised us professional-level theater following a sumptuous prime rib feast at the Maui Beach Hotel, and they delivered. The voices were uniformly good, and even superb in the case of Jerry Eiting, Cat Hayes, Krista Dimoglou and Mark Geraghty. The dancing was stellar throughout, especially the tap numbers and the spoof "Singapore Sue." Audience members stood and applauded Dimoglou's last tap number, the military salute "Star Tar," deservedly so . . . it really was that good.

"Dames" offers a stereotypical story line, but that was the plan when written in 1962 by George Haimsohn and Robin Miller, with music by Jim Wise. This is a light-hearted, tongue-in-cheek imitation of the big musicals of Broadway, which were almost parodies of themselves already. Its strength is in its physical comedy, torchy love songs that unite the three girls with their respective three guys, and fantastic tap and ensemble numbers.

Ruby, an ingenue fresh from Centerville, comes to Broadway with nothing but tap shoes hoping to find fame and fortune. She gets cast in practically her first minute on stage and then Dick, a sailor/wannabe songwriter, falls on her and in love with her — is this fantasy or what? But the show's diva, "really big star Mona," wants Dick, too, and isn't going to give him up to a hick from Utah. When the theater is demolished on opening night, the cast moves the entire show to the deck of the battleship of Captain Courageous, fortunately a man big and sexy enough for Mona.

In a case of life imitating art, the power blew just after intermission. "Dames" is about how the show must go on, regardless of losing a stage or seasick star, and that is exactly what the cast had to do on opening night. Mayor Alan



Professional Artists of the Pacific photo
Jerry Eiting and Cat Hayes are a dynamic duo in this high-spirited musical comedy.

Arakawa, in the audience with councilman Joseph Pontanilla and their wives, determined after a brief dark recess that much of Kahului was without power and would likely stay that way for a while. The enterprising musicians came up with a battery-powered keyboard while the producers shined flashlights as stage lights, and it was anchors aweigh again for "Dames."

I would not have been surprised to find out that Eiting as Capt. Courageous and Hayes as Mona had blown the hotel circuits with their hot rendition of "The Beguine." The town Pensacola becomes Kahului in the song; it's been a very long time since Kahului harbor evoked words like "sinfully lustful" and "hotly romantic." These two stars are powerful performers with huge voices and stage presences, and to have them playing comedic singing roles opposite each other was like getting creme brulee for dessert.

We've seen each before. Eiting stars in multiple roles here, on the Mainland and internationally. He is, as well, probably the best baritone soloist of Maui, and co-founder of the Maui Light Opera Company with his partner and "Dames" vocal coach, Debra Lynn. Hayes, living proof of the song line "there is nothing like a dame," was most recently Rhetta in "Pump Boys and Dinettes" and has an extensive theatrical history. She had played Ruby in a performance 20 years ago, when she was "younger, thinner and blonder," according to the cast notes.

This was my first time to see the lovely Dimoglou, who played the

lead role of Ruby with sparkling style. It's fair to label her a triple threat for her dancing, singing and acting skills. How fortunate that she has returned to the smaller stages of our fair isle, leaving the lights of New York, California and the rest of the world behind.

"Adorable as a pound puppy" was one wag's description of male lead, Dick, played by Geraghty. He was cute enough to take home plus a delightful song-and-dance man. Look for him with the Maui Song and Dance Company and coming up on Feb. 17 in David Ward's dance production at the MACC.

Island choreographer and delicious dancer Camille Romero stepped into the role of the sassy chorus girl Joan fairly recently, which the audience would not have known from her strong performance. John Messersmith, as loose-limbed Lucky, danced a daring duet with Romero in "Choo-Choo Honeymoon."

Honors too, to Anne Durham, musical director and keyboardist, who had to play the second act on a substitute keyboard with little light to read the score. Peter Della Croce had to drum in the dark. Happy tapper and choreographer Misty Heinsman can count this show a success. In addition, scenic artist John Merrifield painted an intimate set, made more so in the dark. Marlys Spencer hit just the right note with her ditsy costumes.

Don't let this slapstick show sail without you — it's only here through Thursday. Book ahead for a seat because prices are higher at the door. Superbowl Sunday widows and widowers would find this a great escape.

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■ "Dames at Sea" plays nightly through Thursday in the Elleair Ballroom of the Maui Beach Hotel. Seating for dinner begins at 6 p.m., and the show begins at 7:15 p.m. Advance tickets are \$60 for the evening Dinner Buffet and show, and \$50 for today's matinee buffet (beginning at noon) and show, with discount rates for keiki, 5-10 years old. Buy tickets from any cast member; or call 800-595-4849 or 875-4367; buy online at www.proartspacific.com; or in person at Kopies Business Center, 2395 S. Kihei Rd. at Dolphin Plaza or Marnie's Dance Supply at 115 Lipoa St. in Kihei