

## Early Crighton Era Returns With "VAUDEVILLE"

By DAVID DOW BENTLEY III

“The People’s Critic”

(Conroe COURIER 09.20.09----  
www.ThePeoplesCritic.com 09.20.09)

When Harry Crighton built his theater in Conroe back in the 1930’s, he imagined it hosting both Vaudeville shows and the films of the period. As the popularity of movies prevailed, fading Vaudeville never made it to the **Crighton Theatre** stage, but writer/director, Glen Lambert, in conjunction with **Stage Right Productions**, has decided the time is right to change all that. His brilliantly conceived “**Vaudeville (Finally) Comes to the Crighton,**” is the kind of good clean fun that I think many Americans are hankering for. If Lambert does not package this concept for export to community theatres around the country, I think he will be missing a golden opportunity that might help support future offerings from Stage Right.

Before the curtain went up, authentic old-style radio announcements established the period atmosphere. Then it was on to the glamorous opener of “The Girl on the Magazine Cover,” with lead singer Harold E. Wood, Jr. and the talented ensemble cast in elegant formal attire, a chic fashion show (costumes by Kylee Michelle Huddleston), and a classy looking stage draped in gold lamé. (Set design, Gregg Kelly). Right from the beginning the lighting (designer, Roger Ormiston), and sound (designer Jim Tatum), would give the show effective eye and ear appeal under the fine overall technical direction of James Bingham.

Next up were the delicious barbershop quartet sounds of The Statesman Chorus as they portrayed the vintage foursome known as The Major Chords. Their renditions of tunes like “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” were soothing balm for the soul. With comic flair, Patti Barnes portrayed Saucy Susan as she first delivered an amusing comic turn with “Second Hand Rose,” and later gave the audience a sample of Blossom Seeley with a rendition of “S’Wonderful” that was perhaps a bit less than wonderful on Opening Night. Miss Barnes would score more successfully when joining with Gerald Livingston for a laugh-filled “Burns & Allen” comedy sketch that worked quite well.

For magic fans, local magicians Shan Griffith and

Matthew Elston supply the prestidigitation of Vaudeville greats, Mysterio and Bloodstone, performing tricks that both amaze and amuse. Then the "Gallagher & Shean" segment featured Kaitlyn Lyon and some very fine singing of witty and rhyming nonsense songs from Mr. Wood, and Tommy Hunter. The classic "Flugle Street" comedy sketch that followed provided plenty of "corn" and plenty of laughs.

Portraying Baby Rose Marie, and with her pretty face framed by a crisp pageboy haircut, adorable Rebekah King had a lovely blue-green gown and a sweetly shy voice while she sang "Somebody Loves Me" to her proud dad, John King. Then, in a lighter mood, Stage Right stalwart, Carolyn Corsano Wong portrayed Fannie Brice as she delivered an amusing "Tale of the Oyster," that featured some ancient Egyptian-style dance moves that were a riot.

Catherine Anderson and Michael Raabe gave us the act known as "Don and Delilah," and offered a sparkling Irving Berlin medley featuring such hits as "I Love a Piano," along with a sweet rendition of "Mountain Greenery" that had some fine backup dancers. With cute choreography, and dressed in deliciously outrageous western outfits, Marshall and Hunter Micklitz presented "Ragtime Cowboy Joe" as an act called "The Johnson Twins," featuring Patti Barnes and Gerald Livingston. Then, for Betty Boop fans, Patti Adams evoked Helen Kane and twirled her feather boa as she performed a '20's style "I Wanna be Bad" with a bit of devilish tapping help from some fine supporting dancers. Miss Adams would follow up with a sultry "I Wanna Be Loved By You."

Cindy Tippens and Yvonne Nelson sparkled as Nancy & Norma in "Ballin' the Jack," while for fans of Fred Astaire and his sister Adele, Angela Graves and Fred Perry offered the graceful dancing of "Putting on the Ritz." And speaking of dancing, statuesque and lovely Lorraine Counts did a graceful fan dance to "Claire De Lune" that made me wish there had been a few "bumps and grinds." Meanwhile, throughout the evening, assorted classic comedy sketches kept things moving with topics like "The Water Cooler," "In Marbled Halls," "Side Show Specialties," and a "Sweepstakes Ticket" routine that was a bit overlong for late in the evening.

Other highlights included solid renditions of "Dinah," and "Zing Went the Strings of My Heart," from the Gumm Sisters, played by Mary Robbins, Kaitlyn Lyon, and last but not least, little powerhouse Kaylie King as Judy-Garland-to-be, Frances Gumm. Mr. Raabe led the full cast in a finale of "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody," but I think what I will

remember most is the stunning Sophie Tucker number, "Some of These Days," from red-hot mama, Yvonne Nelson. She hit the ball right out of the park. That, for me, was Vaudeville!

*Stage Right* will present "**Vaudeville (Finally) Comes to the Crighton,**" thru Sept. 27th at the historic downtown Crighton Theatre, 234 N. Main Street in Conroe. Show times will be Friday and Saturday nights at 8 p.m. and Sunday matinees today and next Sunday at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$15 for senior citizens and \$12 for children and students with ID. Call (936) 441-7469 to reserve.

---

*Bentley's columns, featured in newspapers from the East Coast to the Gulf Coast, may be viewed on the website at [www.ThePeoplesCritic.com](http://www.ThePeoplesCritic.com) while E-mail may be addressed to [ThePeoplesCritic@earthlink.net](mailto:ThePeoplesCritic@earthlink.net)*