

## Deseret News

### The Utah Shakespearean Festival

Comedy, tragedy and musicals highlight this summer's shows

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CEDAR CITY — The 43rd edition of the Utah Shakespearean Festival opened June 24 on the campus of Southern Utah University in Cedar City with six productions rotating on three stages — the outdoor Adams Memorial Theatre (considered to be one of the most authentic Elizabethan theaters in the world), the Randall L. Jones Theatre and the newly refurbished Auditorium Theatre.

In addition to the plays and musicals, there is a weekly calendar of related activities — free play orientations, morning seminars of the previous night's productions, backstage tours, art exhibits and nightly Greenshow entertainment.

Also, from mid-August through Sept. 3, the Plays in Progress series will let USF audiences see staged readings of new works that are in development.

Following are reviews of this summer's six productions — the three Randall shows and the three Adams productions (one of which has additional matinees in the nearby Auditorium).

The musicals "My Fair Lady" and "Forever Plaid," along with the slice-of-life period drama "Morning's at Seven," can be seen on the Randall L. Jones Theatre stage.

• **MY FAIR LADY** (running time: two hours, 45 minutes, with one intermission).

Directed and choreographed with elegance and brisk energy by Marc Robin, and showcasing an ensemble packed with talent, "My Fair Lady" is this season's big "audience-pleaser" production.

From Janet Swensen's beautiful costumes to R. Eric Stone's stylistic sets, this "Lady" is visually stunning as well.

Kurt Ziskie, who last year turned Billie Dawn into a newly educated woman in "Born Yesterday," is doing the same thing for London guttersnipe Eliza Doolittle. He's wonderfully brusque as professor Henry Higgins.

Melinda Pfundstein is perfectly cast as Eliza, who makes the magical metamorphosis from Cockney flower girl to elegant "princess."

Anne Newhall, who played Billie Dawn last season, delivers a great performance as Mrs. Pearce, who runs the Higgins household like a combination of Beatrice Lilly and Thelma Ritter.

Other great performances come from Peter Sham as Eliza's philandering father, Alfred P. Doolittle; Richard Kinter as Colonel Pickering, the linguist who joins Higgins for Eliza's makeover; Anne Cullimore Decker, as Mrs. Higgins, Henry's long-suffering mother; and Jason Heil as love-smitten Freddy Eynsford-Hill.

Director Robin's knack for choreography really shines in the energetic Cockney men's ensemble dances and the refined restraint of the Ascot races. The "Cockney Quartet" — Aaron Galligan-Stierle, Phil Hubbard, Kevin Kiler and Justin Leath — literally stops the show.

I do have one quibble. The orchestra had a harsh, almost brittle sound, not the lush backdrop "My Fair Lady" needs.

That aside, it's notable that Shakespeare's works aren't the only classics on display this summer in Cedar City, as Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe's masterful reworking of George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" proves that it still ranks right up there with the best of them.

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***My Fair Lady*, Utah Shakespearean Festival, 2004**