

Director's Notes

By Don Stephenson

GUYS ^A_N^D DOLLS

Guys and Dolls is often called the “perfect, classic” musical. There’s a reason for this. The show doesn’t require a novel reinterpretation or directorial “vision” because the show simply works as it is, and just as beautifully today as it did when it opened in 1950. The director’s job, then, is simply to trust that material and to present it faithfully.

What is essential is to realize that, while *Guys and Dolls* does demand a particular style, the characters in it must be presented humanly, but with innocence, romanticism, and largesse that transcends realism. So a balance must be struck in the playing of these characters. Our gangsters aren’t the gritty criminals seen on HBO, nor are they cartoon buffoons; they are real, open-hearted humans with romantic notions and dreams of making it big.

There are some challenges to bringing *Guys and Dolls* to the Goodspeed stage. *Guys and Dolls* is a large show. It takes place in the biggest, flashiest, spot in the universe: New York City’s Times Square and the surrounding area. So, the challenge is to present this larger-than-life world on the petite, elegant stage that is the Goodspeed Opera House. It requires a truly creative scenic design, one that creates the illusion of a large area without the actual dimensions of it.

Further, *Guys and Dolls* was originally designed to be performed “down in one.” This means you bring in the curtain, you play a scene in front of the curtain, and meanwhile you are setting up a new scene behind the curtain. When the scene is over down front, you bring up the curtain, revealing a new locale behind it. Today’s audiences, however, are more sophisticated and expect smooth, cinematic transitions. So, there are challenges in getting from scene to scene seamlessly and creating two vastly different worlds—New York City and Havana on one stage—in a way that is seamless, believable, and complete.

Audiences can expect to laugh at Burrow’s hilarious book, be carried away by the romance of the story, transported by the glorious Loesser score, and excited by choreography that is dynamic and character/story-driven.

