

PST Review: ‘She Loves Me’
by Stu Duncan
Reprinted from the June 26, 2013, issue of U.S. 1 Newspaper

If you don't remember a 40- year-old Broadway musical titled "She Loves Me," you're probably not alone. It starred Daniel Massey, Barbara Cook, Barbara Baxley, and Jack Cassidy, but had an unremarkable score by Jerry Bock and a plot that had been used before and since.

So you are far more likely to recall some of the other works that used the same story. Most recently, there was "You've Got Mail," the film that starred Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Or perhaps the old favorite, "The Shop Around The Corner," an early Jimmy Stewart/Margaret Sullivan film. Or "In The Good Old Summertime," with Judy Garland and Van Johnson. They were all based on a play by Miklos Laslo, a Hungarian playwright who wrote "Parfumerie" in 1940.

Now, if you can put all those title clues together, you can work out the storyline: a Budapest perfume shop where a pair of clerks who rather dislike each other are also carrying a secret pen pal romance. And the Princeton Summer Theater, based in Murray Theater on the university campus, is opening the season with "She Loves Me." The results are so spectacular, you will remember the show this time.

The reasons are many. In no particular order: it is a superb company, all are fine singers, exciting dancers, and as importantly, sensitive actors. It is being directed by an extraordinary talent — Sarah Bischoff, who also handled the terrific choreography. She graduated from Princeton in 2009 and is now freelancing in New York. Based on the production here, expect to see her name on Broadway shows soon. Also Emily Whitaker, a music major at the university who conducts a seven-piece orchestra from the keyboard.

This is one of those old-fashioned musicals where just about anyone on stage (and there are 13 of them total) gets the chance to shine individually. And boy, does this troupe grab those chances. The romantic leads, Holly Linneman (Amalia) and Woody Buck (Georg), have some lovely scenes, both together and separately. Part of the great charm of the evening is that you really care what happens to them.

But the so-called "supporting cast" has terrific moments as well. Kenny Francoeur as Steven Kodaly; Tommy Prast, Sipos; Brad Wilson, Arpad, the delivery boy who works his way up the corporate ladder; Evan Thompson, the store owner whose hard heart is far more tender than expected; Katrina Michaels, the nervy, exciting Ilona; and Chris Beard as the head waiter whose sole wish is for "a romantic atmosphere."

And, of course, the ensemble members who are called on to be store customers, Christmas carolers, and even appear up and down the aisles, or in various corners when needed. Maeve Brady, Victoria Gruenberg, Emma Paton, Pat Rounds, and Nikki Yarnell. Not a weak link anywhere. You get the feeling this could well be a stunning summer season. Next up is Beth Henley's "Crimes of the Heart."

She Loves Me, Princeton Summer Theater, Hamilton Murray Theater, Princeton University, Princeton. Continues Thursday to Sunday, June 27 to 30, Thursday through Saturday, 8 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday 2 p.m. \$20-\$25. 877-238-5596 or www.princeton.edu/~pst.