

## **From the Schenectady Gazette**

Young SLOC performers thoroughly captivating

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By Paul Lamar

SCHENECTADY — When Lisa Passonno Franklin, Pat Hoffman, and Ken Zarnoch finally relinquish the mantle of area musical comedy stars (and they needn't do that soon, since they definitely still have the goods), there will be another generation fit to wear it. Many of them are already on the stage at Schenectady Light Opera Company in a splendid production of "Thoroughly Modern Millie."

### **'Thoroughly Modern Millie'**

WHERE: Schenectady Light Opera Company, 826 State St., Schenectady

WHEN: through Sunday

HOW MUCH: \$22, adults; \$12, children under 13

MORE INFO: (877) 350-7378

Whatever reservations director Jeffrey Scott originally had about casting such a young bunch of performers, his considerable talent and their complete stage-worthiness trump anyone's uncertainty.

I, too, had my doubts after reading Bill Buell's Gazette preview noting that Millie was being played by a high school senior. Doesn't the part call for someone in her early 20s? Well, if Sutton Foster is your only yardstick, you'd fail to take the measure of a glorious young performer named Julia Franklin, whose larceny of your heart begins with her dramatic entrance from the back of the house down the middle aisle shedding Millie's Kansas corniness in "Not For the Life of Me," an anthem of determination to make it in New York City in 1922.

The story follows the travails of Millie Dillmount and other aspiring young actresses, all housed at the Hotel Priscilla, which is run by white slaver and failed thespian Mrs. Meers (Hoffman). A modern gal, Millie pragmatically sets her matrimonial sights on her office boss, Mr. Graydon (Zarnoch), becomes confused by a fling with Jimmy Smith (Joel Shapiro), gets motherly advice from chanteuse Muzzy Van Hossmere (Lisa Franklin), pals around with Dorothy Brown (Mackenzie Barman), and finally comes to her senses when she discovers that marriage is, indeed, an affair of the heart, not the pocketbook.

Director/choreographer Scott's excellent work is complemented by Bruce Holden's pit band, Duncan Morrison's all-purpose set (changed stealthily by a crack crew), and Joe Fava's period costumes.

### **Energetic ensemble**

Kudos to the grinning, hoofing, and harmonizing ensemble, energetic all; the bossy barbs of Megan DiNicola's Miss Flannery; Zarnoch's spot-on patter song; Lisa Franklin's enduring vocal chops; Hoffman's droll deliveries as Mrs. Meers and her trio a la Jolson with Wilson Cheung and John Qiao; and Barman's elegant soprano.

Finally, Shapiro and Franklin. OK, there are young singers who can deliver the way these two do, and dancers up to their standards. But it's the acting of their songs and the scenes between that sets them apart. Listen to him mine the music and the meaning of "What Do I Need With Love?" and "I Turned the Corner," and explain how she can so fully capture the heartache of "Jimmy" and the rawness of "Gimme Gimme." Throw in the chemistry between them, and you have a couple of performances that make birth certificates irrelevant.

Tap, song, goofy characters: "Thoroughly Modern Millie" opens SLOC's 82nd season with a bang.