

SAN FRANCISCO

by Richard Connema

American Musical Theatre of San Jose's *Gypsy* Is a Stylish Production

American Musical Theatre of San Jose is presenting one of the most beloved musicals of all time, *Gypsy*, with music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by Arthur Laurents. This classic musical runs through April 9 at the San Jose Center for Performing Arts. The theatre has unveiled a new state of the art sound system; however, in the second act, some of the voices come over very shrill. Rose's last big number almost shakes the rafters of this large auditorium.

Many critics consider *Gypsy* the perfect musical and it has become a major part of American popular culture. Rose is the poster child for all aggressive mothers who push their children on the stage, and *Gypsy* revivals occur frequently in this country.

Gypsy has been an important part of my life since I mounted a camera as an assistant on the Warner's lot to film some of the musical sequences for the film version. I also watched Rosalind Russell rehearse and sing the great songs in the Burbank studio. I have seen so many great Roses, including the incomparable Ethel Merman who was the epitome of the role. Angela Lansbury and Bernadette Peters made the role more human while Margaret Whiting and Tyne Daly were effective as the stage mother from hell. I have seen good regional productions starring Karen Morrow, Meg MacKay and Mary Bracken Phillips.

Marya Grandy (Off-Broadway *The Great American Trailer Park Musical*) is the youngest actress to play the aggressive mother in my mind. She can belt out a song and she plays it with no humanity whatsoever. During the second act, she appears to have run out of steam and her acting becomes wooden. Unfortunately, her big number at the end, "Rose's Turn," is ear-piercing due the sound system.

Candice Michael (played across the country in regional roles and ex Radio City Rockette) gives an effectual performance as June. She gives a credible rendition of "If Momma Was Married"



**Marya Grandy and
Megan Hart Jimenez**

with Megan Hart Jimenez (*Irving Berlin's White Christmas*) as Louise. Both voices blend nicely. Ms. Jimenez is striking to look at later when she performs "Let Me Entertain You," which has almost become a cliché. However, there is no charisma when she sings the song as Gypsy Rose Lee.

Matt Bauer (played Tulsa in the Bernadette Peters revival of the music on Broadway and recently was in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*) gives a show-stopping dance and singing routine in "All I Need Is the Girl." He dances and sings the song with wonderful enthusiasm. Rick Hilsabeck (recently concluded *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* on Broadway) seems lost in the role of Herbie. It was never a great part for an actor and even when he finally decides to leave Rose there is no dramatic impact.

Elizabeth Palmer (Wicked Witch in *Wizard of Oz*) as Tessie Tura, Melinda Moreno Miller (30 years in regional show biz) as Mazeppa and Tami Dahbura (performed in Off Broadway and national tours) as Electra in "You Gotta Get a Gimmick" are fun to watch, especially in the outlandish costumes by Thomas G. Marquez. All of his costume designs are as opulent as a Ziegfeld revue.

Kathryn Foley (performed in 10 regional shows in the past two years) as Baby Louise and Amanda Sylvia (made her debut in AMTSJ's *Sound of Music*) as Baby June are each cute as a button "Let Me Entertain You." David Curley (SFBATCC winner for best musical actor of 2005) plays several roles, including the hilarious clown Uncle Jocko, played as if burlesque were still the rage. Matthew Brandon Hutchens (*Irving Berlin's White Christmas* and *Brigadoon*) plays several roles, including the burlesque house manager sounding like a Damon Runyon character. He is also part of the adult male dancing ensemble which includes Matt Bauer, Alex Hsu and Jeff Leibow (all regional singers and dancers) in some excellent foot work. The younger version of the Newsboys includes Nicholas Berg, Gabriel Dylan Hoffman, James T. Seifert and Jake Williams (all local), all very professional dancers in their routine with Baby June and Louise. Stephen Pawley and Joe Duffy are good in their small roles while the Hollywood Blondes that include Elizabeth Palmer, Jenn Harris, Shari Jordan, Andrea Moody, Gia Solari and Nicole Tung are fun to watch.

J.B. Wilson has designed some very stylish sets for this production. Many are half sets with a full curtain covering one half of the stage in some of the scenes. The Ziegfeld number is a very affluent scene. The sound needs to be worked on, especially in the second act where a shrillness is given to the voices. William Liberatore leads the great orchestra that never misses a beat. The overture is marvelous, and it gets you wanting to sing out those marvelous songs. Tim Bair's direction is good; however, the second act needs more zip to keep the musical moving along. It tends to drag in many places.