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Husband, wife in step directing 'Parade' show

Musical numbers lighten message

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

The drama "Parade," at Stained Glass Theatre through Sunday, is about what divides us. To stage the play, theater company Footlighters Inc. has divided the directing duties.

Husband and wife Dee Anne Bryll and Ed Cohen are co-directing the production about a Jewish factory owner, Leo Frank, wrongly accused of murdering a female employee in 1913.

"As collaborators, we conceptualize the show together and map out how we'll stage it," Cohen said.

ADVERTISEMENT "Dee Anne will usually stage the actual musical numbers - though I did some in 'Parade' - and we'll block the other scenes together. We tend to share rehearsal responsibilities, other than Dee Anne's focus on actual choreography, which she's a lot better at than I am."

Cohen's experience is in directing non-musical plays. Bryll, a choreographer, focuses on musical theater.

Bryll finds working and living with her collaborator helpful.

"It's nice because we're together all the time, we can discuss it when something comes to us," Bryll said.

Although it deals with strong subject matter - not only anti-Semitism but the Franks' strained marriage and Leo Frank's eventual lynching - the play is a musical.

"The music is what really spoke to us," Bryll said. She said music used in darker material has a long history, citing "Ragtime" and "South Pacific" and Stephen Sondheim's "Assassins."

"The power of musical theater is that it uses the musical numbers to enhance the action of the play and show the emotions from a different angle," Cohen said. Heightening the emotion, Cohen and Bryll choose to focus on the husband and wife relationship in the play rather than the politics of the time.

Bryll and Cohen said their co-directing was one of the reasons the play is being produced.

Cohen said the play is rarely produced, not only because of its subject matter, but because the music is difficult and it has an elaborate book.

"It was a project that worked well for Dee Anne and I to collaborate on," Cohen said.

Bryll agreed.

"He'll work with two actors while I'm working with another section," Bryll said.

If you go

What: "Parade," presented by Footlighters Inc.

When: 8 p.m. today-Saturday; 2 p.m. Sunday

Where: Stained Glass Theatre, 802 York St., Newport

Tickets: \$17. Call 513-474-8711

"We work together, but sometimes we'll split up just to get the work done quicker," she said.

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