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Annapolis offers a big 'Swing' for its 47th season opener

May 16, 2013 | By Mary Johnson, For The Baltimore Sun

Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre will begin its 47th season of theater under the stars May 23 with Paul Kelly's "Swing."

The show, which debuted on Broadway in 1999, will open the troupe's season of three musicals at the outdoor theater at 143 Compromise St., across from City Dock.

Loaded with [great](#) music from the eras of the Lindy Hop to hip-hop, "Swing" will run Thursdays to Sundays through June 15.

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Summer Garden Theatre president Carolyn Kirby says "Swing" is "not our typical musical, but a celebration of a uniquely American musical phenomenon."

The show has no spoken dialogue — just songs. It aims to celebrate the wide appeal of jazz and its legacy of [helping](#) to shatter ethnic and cultural barriers. Songs in the show cover a period from the 1930s and 1940s to today.

At a recent rehearsal, dance numbers neared perfection as performed by a talented troupe of nine dancers. They practiced moves requiring athleticism and courage.

Director and choreographer Patricia Golden noted that among the show's demands are 36 musical numbers — an enormous number to choreograph and rehearse. On top of this, Golden also must rehearse and stage vocal soloists, duets and choruses in various scenes.

Julie Ann Hawk serves as musical director, and brings such treasured songs as "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)," "In the Mood," "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," "Stompin' at the Savoy" and "I'll Be Seeing You."

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Sure to add sparkle are Summer Garden favorites Amanda Cimaglia and Hannah Thornhill, whose dance moves could earn raves on Broadway, and singer Katie Gardner, who impressed as Hope Harcourt in "Anything Goes," the Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre's 46th season opener.

'[title of show]'

The second show of the season is a newcomer to Summer Garden — "[title of show] (clean version)" — a Tony-nominated show celebrating the joy of musical theater, running June 27 through July 20.

This production is described by Kirby as being "about two struggling young authors, who, with the help of two friends and a pianist, decide to [write](#) a musical for a competition. In the course of the show, they write the script, compose the songs and submit their opus."

"It's not quite 'Let's put on a show,' but more of a 'How do you write a show?' " she said.

In a span of 90 minutes, the partners create and perform the show — and [learn](#) lessons about writing a musical and about their friendship. This show has been called a postmodern homage to the grand tradition of backstage musicals such as "Kiss Me Kate."

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The music and lyrics are by Jeff Bowen, and the [book](#) is by Hunter Bell. Nominated for a 2008 Tony for best book of a musical, the show's confusing title offers little in the way of plot summary to potential audiences.

'Into the Woods'

The season closes with Stephen Sondheim's "Into the Woods," last presented at Summer Garden in 2001. When it opened on Broadway in 1998, Sondheim's fractured fairy tale won three Tony Awards — for best score, best book and best actress (Joanna Gleason). It will run Aug. 1 to Sept. 1.

Kirby notes that the season closer "will be a tad different from our 2001 version, in that the narrator will now be a young boy — not an old man. This is important to the story, but no more clues."

The show famously interweaves several familiar fairy tales so that, at the end of Act 1, characters seem to be headed for "happily ever after." But Act 2 takes an unexpected turn, revealing what really happens after everyone's wish has been granted and the consequences of their actions return to haunt them ever after.

As the characters learn valuable lessons about responsibility, audiences can enjoy Sondheim's complex music under the stars.

As an added bonus this year, Kirby says the troupe will enjoy an improved sound system that includes all new cabling, and new outdoor speakers installed by the Summer Garden's tech team.

Season tickets can be ordered at \$50 each for all three shows. For information, call the box office at 410-268-9212 or go to summergarden.com.

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