

King & I, reigns in Seattle

Judith van Praag

For a wonderful night on the town, head on over to the 5th Avenue Theatre to enjoy a lovely performance of Rodger and Hammerstein's musical "The King and I".

The story is based on Margaret Landon's book: "Anna and the King of Siam"; in its turn fiction, after the real life adventures of Anna Leonowens, a British governess, who's hired by the King of Siam to teach his 67 children.

Anna's Western ways threaten the King's beliefs. The clash of customs is often humorous. Over time the strong willed characters start to take a liking to each other.

Ever shining Stefanie Powers (Hart to Hart, The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.) as Anna, and versatile Ronobir Lahiri (beside appearing on stage and in TV. and film productions, he's a sound designer) provide a strong stage presence.

Listening to mezzo-soprano Catherine Mieun Choi, who gives Lady Thiang a wonderfully full-bodied voice, is a joy.

Nita Baxani and Martin Sola, as Princess Tuptim and her lover Lun Tha, are well able to steal the hearts of their audience; as are, as a matter of fact, the King's children. And director Baayork Lee gives the rest of the cast equal opportunity to shine.

Susan Kikuchi has recreated Jerome Robbin's original choreography as modern dance with Asian flair. Especially in "The Small House of Uncle Thomas", the performers, clad in gorgeous costumes by Roger Kirk, and lead by Natalie Turner as Eliza and guided by the angel, portrayed by Sae La Chin, drive that scene home to 2005.

The interior of the 5th Avenue Theatre was modeled after ancient Imperial China's Forbidden City, the Temple of Heavenly Peace and the Summer Palace. While not exactly Bangkok in the 1860's, the building's environment enhances Kenneth Foy's suggestive scenic design. John McLain's lighting is flawless.

This Tony Award-winning musical with it's dazzling Rodger and Hammerstein score, features songs such as "Hello Young Lovers," "I Whistle a Happy Tune," "Shall We Dance" and "Getting to Know You." All together the show's a lust for the eye and the ear.

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