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well — with the emphasis on "live." See an entire Mozart opera, "Cosi Fan Tutte" (That's the Way Women Are), Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 7:30 and Sunday at 2:30 in the Dungeon Theatre. For home-grown opera to run two weeks in a row is unprecedented, especially with the quality so high. Huntingdon students, recent graduates and faculty are cast together, so that vocal coaches appear along with their proteges. The fast-paced show in English, owes a lot of its energy to Jason Beasley's stylish piano accompaniment, with Christopher Tilley playing continue on the harpsichord. The Dungeon Theatre is small enough that no singer needs to

force, and everyone can be heard, even the lighter men's voices that mature later than women's ones. George Olsson's candy-box set establishes the right mood, along with Jason Smith's costumes. The cast is headed by Carrie Prewitt and Susan A. Cooper, all the more convincing because of their youthful looks. Once again Dr. James Glass, who also plays Don Alfonso, is the behind-the-scenes producer and musical director. Fiona Macleod directs the stage action. The Baisely Powell Ellebash Opera Theatre, the underwriter, more than got its money's worth as the whole effort is highly professional. Who would have thought that for the third year in a row we would have such fine live opera in Montgomery?



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REVIEW

'Plaid' spurious effort at best

By Allan Swafford
Special to the Advertiser

Is it an illusion or has every third set on the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's stages degenerated into a gathering of musical instruments intended to accompany a performance of yet another spuriously plotted revue of popular music aimed at a segment of audience that does not find nostalgia a revoltingly sentimental emotion?

In the past three or four seasons this would certainly appear to be the case and "Forever Plaid" is a prime case in point.

Its plot — if we may so dignify with that word anything so tenuous as this — is at best unoriginal. The four members of a singing group killed in an accident in 1964 return to earth to work out their dubious potential, to work out, as it were, their own salvation. This is Billy Bigelow in "Carousel." This is the plot gimmick of a recently (and poorly) remade film classic. This echoes the plots of the Topper novel, films and TV show.

But in "Forever Plaid" this plot offers less grist for the mill than in those works it so apes. Here it is merely a gimmick, a hook on which to hang a haphazard assemblage of cretinous-to-bearable, 1950s popular songs calculated to

better than anticipated

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milk the cash cow of nostalgia.

It is even an age-specific gimmick. No one born after the bland and whitebread '50s, no one unfamiliar with such groups as the Four Freshmen or with the Como crooning style or Tennessee Ernie Ford's country pop, will even get the point here — assuming there is a point.

Physically and musically an attempted satire on the insipid, pre-Beatles musical era, the humor runs to predictable sight gags — the out-of-step character, upside-down music on the piano — and the spoof ends up as dull as the era spoofed. The music, curiously, is better sung than it deserves.

And though "Forever Plaid" is indeed a yawn a minute, an occasional, unlabored laugh startles like a gunshot in the night. Equally startling is the music's momentarily rising above the plane of inferiority. Such a moment is the medley of Belafonte-esque Caribbean music — both in choice and performance. As satire, the show peaks in the hysterically funny spoof of the Ed Sullivan Show.

In short, the four energetic performers — Paul Woodson, Daniel Siford, Allie Laurie and Bill Daelin Gross — at moments transform and transcend their material. They will sell banality through the show's run almost as though it were unique — just as they did opening night.

Allan Swafford has reviewed local theater for more than 15 years. You can contact him by writing Allan Swafford, c/o the Montgomery Advertiser, 200 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104 or by faxing (334) 261-1548.

WANT TO GO?

- **What:** "Forever Plaid"
- **When:** Runs through Feb. 20; showtimes are 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Tuesday through Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday; and 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday
- **Where:** Alabama Shakespeare Festival, in the Blount Cultural Park off Woodmere Boulevard
- **Admission:** \$20-\$30, depending on date; discounts for seniors, military personnel, students and groups of 10 or more
- **Information:** 271-5353