

7 brides, 7 brothers make for tight fit

SULLIVAN — They show you a rollicking good time even while riding by the seat of their pants.

The cast and crew of "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" proved that Wednesday during the opening matinee at the Little Theatre-On The Square. They overcame several difficulties in scaling down the big Hollywood musical to present some lively dancing and heartwarming moments.

The Little Theatre has been billing its opening performance as a "preview" or "final dress rehearsal." Unfortunately, theatergoers saw just that Wednesday afternoon.

The timing of lights and sound effects was off, a door on the set broke and a couple of cast members didn't quite get zipped up during rapid costume changes.

Theresa Churchill

Review



These problems could well disappear as the show continues its run, but it's not good for the Little Theatre to present such an unpolished show to patrons who have paid to see professional theater. Earlier openings this summer of "Sugar Babies" and "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" were excellent, so the theater might want to drop its apologetic marketing lest it become a

self-fulfilling prophecy again.

That said, intelligent direction and choreography, plus sheer fortitude by the performers, help smooth out the rough edges.

The musical tells the story of the seven Pontipee brothers and their efforts to get wives to take care of them at their rugged ranch in the Oregon mountains in 1852.

The show began as a lavish 1954 film starring Howard Keel and Ann Powell, but was re-written for the stage in the last decade.

With its relatively small company and stage, the Little Theatre was forced to go a few steps further in shrinking the show.

The result is a lean, 90-minute production.

A versatile set allows the performers themselves to change the scene even while the action is running. The rustic framework, adorned with oil lanterns and other authentic-looking pieces, creates the right mood then can be pushed out of the way smoothly when it's time for the actors to kick up their heels.

And what a treat the dancing is. "The Sobbin' Women" by the seven brothers, in particular, generates excitement.

The biggest weakness of the production is the limited number of performers playing the townspeople. Granted, there probably wouldn't have been room on the stage for more, but this small



Photo courtesy of R.R. Best

Milly (Shannon McHugh) and Adam (Charles Bell) make up after an argument in "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers."

group cannot pose any real threat to the brothers' plans.

Even so, the singing and acting are strong throughout. Touching performances come from Charles Bell of Chicago as the oldest brother Adam, Shannon McHugh of Chicago as his bride Milly, and

Paul Gritton of Decatur as the youngest brother Gideon.

When the trio sing "Love Never Goes Away" and McHugh sings "Glad That You Were Born" to her character's newborn daughter, many eyes mist up around the house.

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers

Cast

Adam Pontipee Charles Bell
Milly Shannon McHugh
Gideon Paul Gritton
Alice Hynden Walch
Preacher Jeff Coopwood

Technical crew

Director Seth Reines
Choreographer Millie Garvey
Musical director David Fehr
Set design Robert C. Martin
Costumes Susan Branch

Lighting Patty Takahashi
Stage manager Deborah Knopick

Presented by the Little Theatre-on the Square, Sullivan. Remaining performances are at 8 p.m. today through Saturday and Tuesday through July 23, 2 p.m. Sunday, Wednesday and July 24, 4 p.m. Saturday and July 23. Tickets are \$12.50 to \$16.75. Call 728-7375.