

For some, singing required

Naples Daily News, March 2007

"Chess" is one of the best musicals I've never seen.

It's loaded with large-scale, singable music from Abba songwriters Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson and lyrics from Tim Rice ("Jesus Christ Superstar"). Two of its tunes escaped to U.S. pop charts, thanks to Whitney Houston ("I Know Him So Well") and Murray Head ("One Night in Bangkok") even before the show opened in 1986. But the sprawling, poorly edited version for Broadway — substantially recobbled from the London hit — crashed and burned.

So, despite its popularity in Europe, the musical is rarely staged here. Next week, however, TheatreZone offers a tailored staging of the world-politics parable, framed through the Cold War sparring of two national stars for a world chess title, their conflict over the woman they both love and the machinations of both CIA and KGB amid their cerebral settings. Artistic director Mark Danni and Broadway music directing veteran Anne Shuttlesworth work with local Equity actors and Caroline Allen, a Naples youngster who portrays Florence, the female lead, in her childhood years. There's even a "Chess" player: Larry Alexander, Anatoly in the touring version, reprises his role.

Look for fans in the audience who have been nursing their original-soundtrack discs since 1986 to be mouthing the lyrics. You can even look for chess genius Bobby Fischer, model for the musical's American Player: Although he lives in Iceland, Fischer owns property in Naples. TheatreZone presents "Chess" at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday at G&L Theatre, Community School of Naples, 13275 Livingston Road. Tickets are \$35. Call 451-0215.

— *Harriet Howard Heithaus*