

TheatreZone's 'Xanadu' '80s parody is a tuneful, smart coproduction

The plot is inane.

The stage, Theaterlab in the Arts Building at FGCU, is cramped quarters for any musical, let alone one on roller skates.

Finally, in a theater that only holds 90 people, rigging the singers up with mics is major overkill.

And yet, somehow, the production of "Xanadu" from TheatreZone and FGCU Bower School of Music and the Arts works.

After all, the plots of the many classic operas are lunacy. And, to their credit, even the rustiest of the skaters in this production navigated the stage's tight turns without falling.

The mics? We'll harangue on those later.

In the stage musical version, "Xanadu" carbonates into '80s parody the self-conscious film story of a muse who falls for the earthling she's sent to inspire. Its Douglas Carter Beane book skewers the era of leg warmers and California cool so deftly the stage musical earned four Tony nominations, while the original film



COREY PERRINE/STAFF

Peter Lange, playing Terpsichore, from left; Jazmin Edwards, playing Euterpe; Natale Pirrotta, playing Sonny Malone; Deidre Moonan, playing Thalia; and Alana Ferraro, playing Kira, perform during dress rehearsal of the stage musical "Xanadu" at Florida Gulf Coast University in Estero.

only inspired Golden Raspberry awards. There's laugh-out-loud snappy patter perfect for those of us who survived velour sweatsuits, "Dynasty" and Rubik's cubes.

"Xanadu" is serious

about its music, however, and Mark Danni, TheatreZone's artistic director, gets that. He brought in as music director FGCU faculty member/Opera Naples music administrator Robin

Shuford Frank, who oversees a pair of effect-jammed synthesizers ably with Simmy Shim, Ralph Stewart Scholarship winner and former accompanist for Naples Orchestra and Chorus. Along with



HARRIET HEITHAUS

REVIEW

IF YOU GO 'XANADU'

Where: 90-seat Theatre Lab at the Bower School of Music & the Arts, FGCU campus

When: 8 p.m. Saturday and Oct. 8-Oct. 10; 7:30 p.m. Sunday and Oct. 11; 2 p.m. matinees Saturday and Oct. 11

Admission: \$45 and \$40; \$10 price for students

To purchase: Call 888-966-3352 or online at www.theatrezone-florida.com

guitarist Timothy Torres and percussionist Brian Henry they channel enough Electric Light Orchestra gossamer to buoy the entire cast.

Alana Ferraro (Clio-Kira) and Natale Pirrotta

See 'XANADU', 9D

'XANADU' from 1D

(Sonny Malone) need little buoying, however. Ferraro glides from Ancient Greek muse to Aussie wheelbird in lovely voice, strong and true through the entire musical. She's in character every second, whether hopping out comically on one skate after an argument with Sonny or crooning aboard a carousel horse chuffing pink smoke from its aft — yes, that's what Pegasus looks like in a comedy — and turning the entire scene from funny to

poignant.

Pirrotta isn't far behind. His opening angst-ridden Valley Boy scene is a little too ratcheted to make it seem he could be interested in anything but a mirror. Still, he develops into a fine partner for Kira; their rendition of the familiar "Suddenly" nearly outshines the entire ensemble's effervescent "All Over the World" and the title song "Xanadu."

Pirrotta radiates the sincerity and energy of an inspired artist, and with a bit more reactive power will prove a fine foil to Eddie Mekka's Danny Magu-

ire, whose World War II anecdotes are from another planet to Sonny.

Mekka ("The Big Ragoo" from TV's "LaVerne and Shirley") oversteps his two-line fluff quota. Note to Eddie: These actors are watching you. But his heartfelt, sunny take on "Whenever You're Away From Me" and his tap work for "Dancin'" tempt you to forgive him.

Many thanks to the muses, alternately glowing and storming. They have a sweet and strong voice from Jazmin Edwards, singing out as Euterpe and three other characters, and striking

stage chops from Lily Anderson, another four-character star. Laura Needle (Calliope) is appropriately slinky in her role as co-villainess with Karen Molnar (Melpomene), and Molnar as choreographer has wisely featured arms more than feet that are aboard four wheels.

Considering the character changes for most of the partners — Peter Lange has to run from a pair of Cupid wings to a four-legged donkey costume — Kathleen Kolacz has done laudable work.

The stage itself unfortunately radiates rundown concert hall

even through what should be cheery roller disco and Mount Olympus scenes.

And those mics. Ferraro's occasionally cut out. We had hoped for an acoustic musical in an intimate stage like this, with only a 90-minute run time and no intermission.

Still, the music, the laughs and the characters were high-value. (Among many, look for the hilarious leaf-blower moment.) This cast was growing into "Xanadu" Thursday. By the end of its run, those who haven't seen it might have missed one of the season's most fun musical productions.