

- ▣ home
- ▣ music & nightlife
- ▣ movies
- ▣ the arts
- ▣ restaurants
- ▣ classifieds
- ▣ columns
  - ▣ SANTA CRUZ NEWS
  - ▣ CAR CULTURE
  - ▣ THE ROCK SHOW
- ▣ news & features
- ▣ the papers
- ▣ blogs
- 
- \* coupons
- ▣ advertise
- ▣ about us
- ▣ contact

## columns

06.30.10

[home](#) | [metro santa cruz index](#) | [a&e](#)

### 'Swing!' a Hit

Cabrillo Stage pays hip-jiggling tribute to swing music's roots

By Sean Conwell

IT'S GREAT to see theater that is culturally enriching, but sometimes it's just as great to switch off the old gray matter and enjoy theater that's entertainment, pure and simple. Cabrillo Stage's production of *Swing!* falls into this latter category. A lavish spectacle of singing, music and dancing, it makes few demands of its audience and is a lot of fun to watch.



**LEAD SWINGER:** Eleanor Hunter shows off her well-oiled pipes with the help of the 'Swing!' dancers.

At the heart of the show is swing music, the infectious style of big-band jazz, which seized the public's imagination—and feet—during the 1930s and '40s. Although the swing era was largely over by the end of World War II, a younger generation has come to know swing music through the renaissance it enjoyed in the '90s, with bands like Big Bad Voodoo Daddy and the Brian Setzer Orchestra. This revival also saw the return of the dancing style that had accompanied the music in its heyday.

Both elements of the phenomenon, musical and dance, are showcased in *Swing!*, which premiered on Broadway in 1999 at the height of the swing revival, and was nominated for six Tony Awards, including one for best musical. A musical revue, it is comprised of a series of song and dance numbers paying tribute to Louis Armstrong, who pioneered swing, Benny Goodman, who popularized it, and a host of others. With little overarching storyline or characterization, each scene more or less stands on its own. There is a vague plot of sorts: we see the birth of swing in the first act, when a woman (played by Ashley Rae Little) arrives onstage singing light opera. With a little guidance, she is soon singing jazz and dancing with sexual gyrations. Later, we see swing going to war with a performance of "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy." For the most part, however, *Swing!* tells a story of music and dancing divorced from historical context.

Cabrillo Stage's production boasts a full jazz band, five singers and a dozen dancers. The singers, Eleanor Hunter, Ashley Rae Little, Michael Rhone, Jennifer Taylor Daniels and Jarrod Washington, do an especially fine job. Hunter has a big, full voice, and many of the best scenes involve her. During a duet that she and Rhone perform, both singers carry on a conversation that is mainly musical gibberish, but what they are talking about is never unclear. There is a similar scene in Act 2—when Hunter sings "Cry Me a River," it's more like a conversation between her and the accompanying trombone.

Of the whole cast, Jarrod Washington has the greatest stage presence. The show opens with him singing and playing a ukulele, and from then on he dominates nearly every scene he is in, even a goofy barnyard hoedown scene in which he dances on top of a table in cowboy boots.

Cabrillo Stage's set design is minimal, in contrast to the more elaborate backdrop of the original Broadway production. This puts full visual emphasis on director Janie Scott's choreography, which is very good, if not always 100 percent smooth. The dancers move about the stage in authentic '30s and '40s clothing, their swing dancing often peppered with what look like difficult acrobatic moves.

Perhaps the best thing that can be said about *Swing!* is that it conveys the intensity and dynamism of swing music. That's not to say that the play is particularly authentic. Some of what we hear, though from the swing era, is not strictly swing music, and the '50s vocal standard "Cry Me a River" has nothing to do with swing at all. There are also contemporary influences in the music. In some instances, this can be incongruous and slightly irritating, as with the very unswinglike electric keyboard wah-wah effects that appear in some of the songs. Much more successful is the setting of "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" to a hip-hoppy beat, which seems completely natural.

*Swing!* is a fun, simple production with a solid cast of musicians, singers and dancers. If you enjoy pounding drums, blaring woodwinds and the energetic singing and dancing that go with them, this show is well worth your time.

*SWING!* runs through July 18 at the Crocker Theatre, Cabrillo College, 6500 Soquel Drive, Building 4000, Aptos. Tickets and show times available at [www.cabrillostage.com](http://www.cabrillostage.com) and 831.479.6154.

Ads by Google

#### Single Swing Dancers

View Photo Profiles. Join Free. Find Local Singles into Dance.  
[www.Fitness-Singles.com](http://www.Fitness-Singles.com)

#### Jazz Blues Jazz

Get 2000+ Famous Jazz Charts Along With Full Original Recordings  
[www.RealBookSoftware.com](http://www.RealBookSoftware.com)

#### Download Music Here

Tons of Artists 100% Legal. Download Now!  
[Music-Oasis.com](http://Music-Oasis.com)

#### Broadway Comes To Denver

Work with the Best of the Best! 9-Day Musical Theatre Intensive  
[www.broadwaycomestodenver.com](http://www.broadwaycomestodenver.com)

Send letters to the editor [here](#).

-----

metroactive

©Copyright 2010 Metro Newspapers. All rights reserved.