

Evita dazzles the Palace with music, dance

Fairytales of a poor girl who becomes a rising star have been the subject of countless books, films and plays. *Evita* is the true story of Eva Perón as she rises from being a dirt-poor teenager to a struggling actress to the wife of Argentina President Juan Perón. Eva came to Buenos Aires at age 15, became the first lady at 26 and died in 1952 at age 33.

This Tony-award winning musical (1979) by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber features some of Webber's loveliest and most affecting melodies. Madonna played Perón in the 1996 film version, with Antonio Banderas portraying Che Guevara.

Palace director Cliff Butler's production dazzles the audience. Music director Austin Kimble's flawless Latin orchestrations carries the action from scene to scene, and choreographer Jesse Smart's dance numbers pack endless variations on the sexy, dangerous moves of the tango.

"This is the second time we've done *Evita*," Butler said. "I first directed it in 2011. It's always nice to come back and revisit a show. For *Evita* there was new choreography by Jesse Smart and new lighting design by Faith Castaneda — really unique."

"Deanna Belardinelli, our stage manager, does a wonderful job of giving the right cues, making sure all of those flies and all the video cues happen at the right time and nothing hits anybody, and our unique stage turntable turns and all that," he said. "It's an amazing team effort. We rehearsed eight or nine weeks before we opened. Our cast is exemplary."

"The history of *Evita* really made an impression on me," he said. "One of the attractions of this production was that there is actual film footage of this amazing woman who had this in-



PETE'S PICKS

Peter Dossing

Evita



Red Poppy Rating: 5 out of 5

credible impact on Argentina. And so, we interspersed newsreel clips and then showed our actress as well."

The events in *Evita*'s life are presented in song and the show's narrator, Che Guevara (Steve Williams) acts as a kind of foil for Eva by helping her through his own revolutionary fight. As narrator throughout the evening, his dialogue came through loud and clear.

"A favorite part for me was singing with the chorus," Williams said. "I would go right into 'Rainbow Tour,' and then run around the building to make my entrance from the rear of the stage to sing 'And the Money Kept Rolling In (and Out),' which is a totally different animal. There was so much going on in the second act with these kinds of sequences."

Michelle Haché (Eva Perón) was professionally trained in opera from the Juilliard School of Performing Arts. She'll knock your socks off with her wonderful singing.

"I like the buildup of my character because she is coming from a humble place, and I can equate this story to my Father as he also died of cancer," she said. "Whenever I come to



Michelle Haché, top center left, and Jim Lindsay, top center right, play Eva Duarte de Perón and Juan Perón in a scene from *Evita* on the Palace's Springer Memorial Stage.

the last scene where she's on her deathbed, I think of those last minutes I spent with my Dad. It's very hard for me, but it is a very real place for me.

"Eva is a very hungry character and nothing is going to stand in her way — she knew what she wanted. But human beings are human beings, and she came from poverty, she just got greedy. She never stopped loving the people, there was always that part of her that was the underdog."

"There was always the bobble, the clothes, the rings and everything was her way of saying 'Hey look what I did.' Unfortunately, it was to the detriment of the people. So, in the end,

she was such a symbol, and that's what I tried to play off. It's what they leave behind, and the power of the people is what she left behind."

The haunting melody of Webber's "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" will stay with you long after you leave the theater. All the lines in the play are sung — there is no spoken dialogue.

Peter Dossing is a recovering stand-up comedian who enjoys community theater productions.

Evita is now on the Springer Mainstage weekends through July 7 at Georgetown's Palace Theater. Shows are at:

- 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, and
- 2 p.m. Sundays.

Reserved seating tickets for all performances are:

- \$32 for general admission,
- \$29 for seniors (age 55 and older), active military (with ID), students (ages 14-22), and
- \$15 for children (age 13 and younger).

Run time is 2-hours and 20-minutes including intermission. Not rated.



Veronica DeSantos Ryan, front left, joins other ensemble cast members in a scene from *Evita* on the Palace's Springer Memorial Stage.



Steve Williams plays Ernesto "Che" Guevara in the Palace Theatre's production of *Evita* weekends through July 7.