

## It lurched along in the wrong gear...



### GUYS & DOLLS

Now running at the Kenya National Theatre and proving a most popular pre-Christmas attraction is the Nairobi City Players' production of one of the most successful musicals of all time, "Guys and Dolls".

The visiting guest artistes Tim Oldroyd, Henry Chester and Fred Reford head a very strong team of local performers. The leading ladies are Vicky Udall, a professional dancer, as "Adelaide" and Rosemary Robbins as "Sarah". Vicky has given some outstanding performances with the group including the lead in "Cabaret", "Godspell", "The Merry Widow" and "Oklahoma!". Rosemary Robbins played the lead in "Oklahoma!" last year and also sang a principal part in "Pirates of Penzance".

Also in the cast are a number of people who have worked previously with Nairobi City Players, some of them in many of the group's musicals: Joe Muriithi, Gail Goodman, David Hand, Jackie Holt, Enrico Oswego and Chris Coutinho who was the Prince in "King and I". It is interesting to note that veteran City Players Rutik Ronsky and Bryan Epsom have principal parts. Two strong singers have re-joined N.C.P. after an interval of some years. Desmond Sandford (recently returned to Nairobi from Australia) who was last seen in the group's production of "Salad Days" and Mike Horton who last trod the N.C.P.'s boards as long ago as "South Pacific". There are also some very talented newcomers, particularly among the very attractive girl dancers.

The Musical Director is Dick Moss and the Choreographer Margaret Haddad, both of whom have done some fine work in the group's previous musicals. And, of course, Fernand Monast is in full enthusiastic command as the Director.

"Guys and Dolls" is already a big talking point in Nairobi. Booking is heavy (as it always is for this popular date) and you had better hurry if you don't want to be disappointed. ☛

By MARY HAYNE

I HAVE always considered *Guys and Dolls* to be one of the greatest musicals of all time. The story, based on Damon Runyon's satirical tales of New York's minor underworld, is hardly sugary, the musical score by Frank Loesser has an appropriate beat and his lyrics project a hilarious bite rarely found in musical extravaganzas.

With considerable interest, therefore, I presented myself at the Kenya National Theatre a few nights ago to see how the Nairobi City Players and in particular, director Fernand Monast had adapted *Guys and Dolls* to our neck of the international theatre world.

I left with mixed feelings. So much was excellent, but as a director Monast has carried his self-indulgence to extremes.

Despite heroic efforts from the stage crew, 10 scene changes in the first act slowed the continuity to a snail's pace. Monast's designs are superb; however, they are once again too elaborate for an amateur production.

With the best will in the world, the play lurched along like a learner driver struggling through his gears. When it reached the smoothness of top it was sheer delight, but for an unnecessary length of time, we seemed to be in either second or third.

The play opens with a scene which epitomises the numerous strata of big city characters who habitate Broadway. Never underestimate the importance of crowd scenes and the detail here is excellent, with each individual doing his or her bit to perfection.

The whole theme centres around a group of gamblers attempting to find a safe place to hold their crap game. Motivating force is Nathan Detroit (Henry Chester), who would stake his soul if he thought he had one. Nathan, however, is peanuts compared with Sky Masterson (Timothy Oldroyd). Sky is famous for accepting the most outrageous wagers — and this is how *Guys and Dolls* takes off.

Short of ready cash, Nathan lays Sky a bet that he will not be able to take Salvation Army missionary Sarah (Rosemary Robbins) to dinner in Havana. He loses since Sky is also a persuasive lady's man, but the gamble changes everyone's lives.

Two less likely lovers than Sky and Sarah would be difficult to imagine, yet they are closely followed by Nathan and his fiancée of 14 years' standing nightclub singer Adelaide (Vicky Udall).

The girls' careers may be poles apart; under the skin they share a common ambition for a husband, a family and a dear little home in which to rule supreme. And this is where Runyon's unholy wit is allowed full rein.

Vicky Udall is undoubtedly the heroine of the hour and her scenes with Chester (who has played the role before) radiate the 1930s atmosphere. Whenever she appears, the play goes into orbit, for she acts the empty-headed "doll" who has fantasised a happy marriage with a large family to perfection.

Tim Oldroyd's magnificent baritone atones for his lack of familiarity with musical comedy.