

# Talented Cast Makes 'Annie Get Your Gun' Entertaining

BY TERRY POPE

Powerful performances from the leading roles in The Brunswick Players' production of Irving Berlin's musical "Annie Get Your Gun" made the show a success last Friday and Saturday nights.

The spotlight fell on Laura de Frees, a relatively newcomer to the Players company, who played Annie Oakley in the lead role. A native of Memphis, Tenn., Ms. de Frees was a member of the Sock and Buskin Community Theater before moving to Long Beach about a year ago.

She also landed a role in The Players' last production, Neil Simon's comedy "Plaza Suite," as newlywed Norma Hubley. It is her performance as Annie Oakley that people will most remember though, for taking the illiterate, Indian girl role and developing into a memorable performance on stage.

Singing and acting appears to come naturally for Ms. de Frees, just as natural as "shooting the fuzz off a peach" comes for Annie. Her performance last weekend in the environs of Hatch Auditorium on the N.C. Bap-

list Assembly grounds at Ft. Caswell was stunning—a bright, fresh face and voice to match that delighted the audience number after number from the famous musical.

Annie Oakley is a self-taught shooter from the days of the wild west who accepts a challenge in a shooting contest against the finest the famous Buffalo Bill (Lou Welcker) has to offer. After Annie beats Frank Butler (Steve Fitzgerald) in the match, the two battle with their feelings for one another before finally falling in love.

Under the direction of Stuart Callari, the show beams with talent in the leading roles. Fitzgerald as the sometimes romantic, sometimes chauvinistic Frank Butler, is right at home opposite Ms. de Frees. Their combined numbers, especially "They Say It's Wonderful" and "Anything You Can Do," are magical.

Fitzgerald has been acting since the age of four and has published books of poetry, written over 30 songs, and plays several musical instruments. The Players landed a very talented

cast for "Annie Get Your Gun."

Welcker even looks like Buffalo Bill and gives a believable performance as the sturdy, old westerner dressed in cowhide and goatee. Ken Campbell, a Southport attorney, also gives a valuable performance in a role he has played before, Charlie Davenport, or Buffalo Bill's quick-witted, promoter who is locked in competition with Pawnee Bill (Marshall Nero).

Ellie Pittenger's minor, but excellent role as Foster Wilson, the hotel owner, marks another fine performance for The Players member. Pittenger has also performed in The Player's "Brigadoon," "Carnival" and "Plaza Suite" opposite Laura de Frees as her newlywed husband, Roy Hubley. Pittenger seems relaxed in the rough and grumbly roles which he has grown accustomed to.

Making quite a transition from the puppeteer in "Carnival" to Chief Sitting Bull in "Annie Get Your Gun" is Bob Poulk Jr., who plays the comic relief role to its fullest. Dressed in a wild, black wig and green party hat, the chief provided Frank Butler with a run for his money in their battle over Annie.

And who could forget Annie's brother and sisters played by Forrest Whitesides, Morgan Harper, Barrie Campbell and Anna Nero, four of the cutest faces on stage. Whitesides, as Little Jake, steals the hearts of the audience as the little, barefoot, sniffing kid who uses his shirt sleeve for a handkerchief. It is his first performance with The Players.

David Pittenger's Indian dance routines led a well-choreographed performance under the direction of Pat Pittenger and Tricia Foy. Despite some minor problems in changing between scenes, Lee J. Greer Jr.'s set designs were well adapted to the script, especially a beautiful, moonlit backdrop of Manhattan.

Paul Pittenger's wind ensemble also turned in another fine performance. Often the last to gain recognition for the success of a musical, the orchestra, including pianist Susan Williams, deserve a hand for making "Annie Get Your Gun" a success.



TEACHING ANNIE to read is Forrest Whitesides, right, who plays Annie's brother, Little Jake. In his first performance with The Players, Whitesides captured

the hearts of the audience as the small, sniffing kid who uses his shirt sleeve for a handkerchief.



BUFFALO BILL (Lou Welcker), left, and his promoter Charlie Davenport (Ken Campbell), right, eye Chief

Sitting Bull, played by Bob Poulk Jr. Poulk delighted the audience in the comic relief role.



SEEING THEIR names in lights are Steve Fitzgerald, left, who plays sharpshooter Frank Butler, and Laura de Frees as Annie Oakley.

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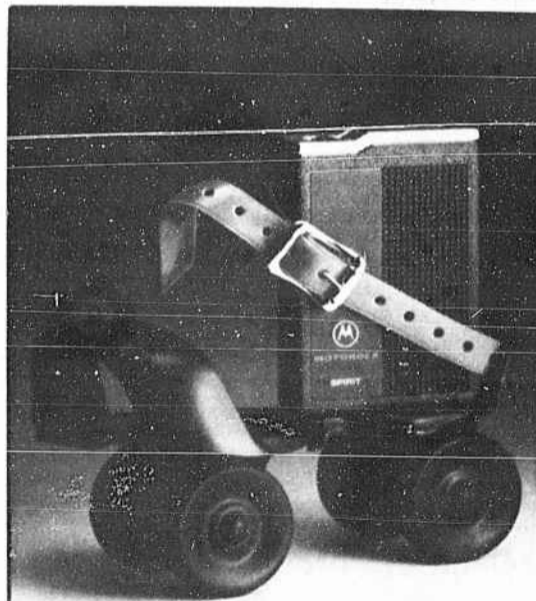
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