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## Megills' 'Dorothy' is light, bright, charming musical

By: PAM KRAGEN - Staff Writer

Someday, North County audiences will look back on the day when they saw Heather and Beth Megill's musical "Ask Dorothy" and be able to say they saw the sisters' work before they became famous. Because judging by the quality of "Ask Dorothy," it's only a matter of when, not if, they'll be turning out musicals at the regional theater level.

The clever, perky "Paper Doll Musical" is fresh, fun and family-friendly. Almost everything about the show is smartly turned out, with Heather Megill's ear-pleasing score and book, Cynthia Megill's creative two-dimensional costumes (white "paper" tabs fold over the all-black backs of each costume), Renee Kollar's jubilant, tap-heavy choreography and its talented singing-and-dancing cast led by the sisters Megill.

Heather's songwriting skills and tonal range have greatly improved over the past five years, and with sister Beth as co-lyricist, the score is



### "Ask Dorothy"

When: 8 p.m. July 14-16; 2 p.m. July 16-17

Where: Avo Playhouse, 303 Main St., Vista

Tickets: \$15, general; \$12, seniors and students; \$10, children 12 and under

Info: (760) 724-2110

Web: www.askdorothythemusical.com

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studded with musical jewels. The ensemble numbers are upbeat and a bit generic, but her ballads and duets are top-notch, particularly "Courage" and "First Love." There's also a women's doo-wop quartet (Kollar, Deirdre Haren, Whitney Fortmueller and Stacey Micoli) who harmonize well and tap-dance, to boot.

While ideally suited for a K-6 audience, "Ask Dorothy" will also appeal to adults who will appreciate the character development, the fine singing and the sweet innocence of its characters and storyline.

Setting the musical in a paper-doll world is quite original, and the enterprising Megills even thought up paper-doll souvenir books to sell in the lobby. But the plot isn't entirely original. If you've seen the films "The Truth about Cats and Dogs" and "Singin' in the Rain," you'll recognize some of the major plot points.

"Ask Dorothy" is the story of Dot, a wholesome, earnest radio advice columnist in Paperville, USA, where all the inhabitants are paper dolls with flat, two-dimensional clothes, homes and appliances (but not personalities). The 20something Dot (played by Heather Megill, who sings beautifully and acts with warmth and likability) is great at doling out romantic advice to others on her program "Ask Dorothy," but she has yet to find her own true love. That changes when a handsome businessman named Walter (golden-voiced Ben McLain) moves into Dot's apartment building, and she's instantly smitten. But Walter's carrying a torch for someone else, as Dot finds out the next day when he calls her radio show to confess his love for the unseen "Dorothy" of radio fame.

Before Dot can confess her true identity, her radio station boss Mr. Madison (Toni Billante) devises a plan to score even bigger ratings for "Ask Dorothy" by passing off a voluptuous but vain diva named Veronica Russell (Lauren Gira) in a TV interview as the "real" Dorothy. Soon, Walter's dating Veronica ---- and Dot's both out of work and homeless. Eventually Dot finds her inner courage, and with the help of her friends ---- Mime, a boy genius and Dot's producer Charlie (Ryan Johnson) ---- she finally stands up for her job, her man and her own needs.

The dialogue is fast-paced and funny, and the musical and dance numbers are bright and snappy. As a world premiere, it's in remarkably polished shape.

There are still a few too many musical numbers (2 1/2 hours is bit long for a youth-oriented musical), and an awful lot of characters onstage don't seem integral to the plot. For example, why does the boy genius Benjamin (endearingly played by David Curtis) need a secretary whose character has virtually no lines but shows up in every group scene? Another major character who is entertaining but not ideally woven into the plot is Mime (Beth Megill), who offers preshow entertainment and frequent comic relief but has no real effect on the central characters. Schools staging the musical will appreciate all the extra roles for students, but larger theaters

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may blanch at the show's casting demands.

The 21-member cast is exceptional, since almost all are required to act, sing and tap dance. And the production is well rehearsed, well choreographed and well designed. Don Megill, Bryon Andersen and Adrian Gibaldi created the sound design, and Richard Hellstern created lighting (the set and prop designer is uncredited).

"Ask Dorothy" is refreshingly different and another feather in the cap for Heather Megill, who has three other musicals under her belt ("Fate," "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Making Ambrosia"). She's hard at work on another about Helen Keller.



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