

# Guys & Dolls

## Detailed Synopsis and Vision for EUCMS production

- ❖ The show opens with "Runyonland" – an orchestral number which sets up the energy and uses mime and story dance to take you into the atmosphere of a morning on Broadway – the rich and famous, the athletes, the tourists and workers arriving just as the lowlife criminals, the cops and con artists and clubbers are leaving behind the traps and the tinsel of the night.
- ❖ Three gamblers – Nicely-Nicely Johnson, Benny Southstreet and Rusty Charlie, emerge from the passing crowds, pick up the morning racing news from a subway kiosk and begin to share their racing tips in harmony – the "Fugue for Tinhorns", and are interrupted by the Save-A-Soul Mission Band, led by the lovely, but very starched-up Sister Sarah Brown, singing "Follow the Fold". In the Damon Runyon story, (but not in the show) we learn that her father and brother were both lost to gambling addictions and abandoned her, but in the show, the gamblers, as well as everyone else, just find her mystifying – she is classy and beautiful, but lacking in warmth, and her preaching seems to be all about morality rather than relationship with God. The crowds drift away from her unappealing appeal, and the Mission Band leaves, disappointed.
- ❖ Harry the Horse enters to ask Nicely-Nicely and Benny whether their boss, Nathan Detroit has found a secret location for his floating crap game (translation: illegal dice game which "floats" from location to location night after night, in order to avoid police detection). He has a guest in town – the Chicago Gangster, Big Julie, who along with many of the "highest rollers" on the scene, has come in search of some "action". They are interrupted by the very angry and zealous Police Lieutenant Brannigan – who has "put the heat on" Nathan, and made it impossible for him to find a place. After he leaves, Nathan arrives to confirm he has just one option left – but Joey Biltmore, the owner of the Garage wants \$1000 in cash before the game, refusing to even risk confirming the venue without the money in hand. Nathan has nothing – he hasn't even been able to afford a present to celebrate his 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being engaged to Miss Adelaide, the star performer at a nightclub nearby. Many other gamblers enter, enthusiastic to find out (and sing what is more or less a mock anthem/hymn) about the "Oldest Established Permanent Floating Crap Game in New York".
- ❖ Sky Masterson, legendary for being the biggest risk taker in the Gambling community is suggested as a solution – if the boys could get him to make a crazy bet they are guaranteed to win, they would have enough money to secure the garage, but just as Nathan sets up a con trick to catch Sky out, Miss Adelaide arrives with some of her friends from the club. She gives Nathan his present – confident in his promise that he has given up the game and is ready to marry her and go "straight". When Sky arrives, he has to get rid of her, and sends the boys to take her to the chemist for the perpetual cold she seems to suffer. Sky sees through Nathan's trick, but when the boys return with instructions from Adelaide, Sky, who values his freedom more than any woman he has yet met, suggests that Nathan is "trapped" by his relationship. Nathan loves Adelaide, but Sky, claiming that all women are alike, boasts that he could take any woman he

chooses to go with him on his planned trip to Havana in Cuba. Nathan seizes the opportunity, and makes a bet that Sky will not convince a woman, to be nominated by Nathan, to go with him. Sky accepts, but is thrown when the Mission Band pass by again, and Nathan nominates Sister Sarah.

- ❖ Sky enters the mission, presenting himself as a sinner eager for redemption. Sarah immediately finds her response to him threatening, and tries to put him off with religious tracts. Sky explains that the only thing that will really make a difference is a more relationship-centred approach – “personal help”. Of course this is an attempt to win her over to the Cuba trip, but a lot of Sky’s advice – such as doing their crusading late at night, since most “sinners” are asleep all day, and his correction of her Bible literacy are surprisingly apt. He offers to help her bring sinners into the mission if she will go out with him, but when he reveals the destination, she is appalled, and tells him she would never go out with a gambler. They both describe, in the duet “I’ll know”, their completely clashing ideals of what the experience of love will be, and the song ends in a kiss – but Sarah breaks the mood by slapping Sky... at which he promises to stick around, in order to give her a shot at the other cheek.
- ❖ Nathan, confident that he will win the bet guarantees the Garage owner his money and then heads to the Hot Box Nightclub, where Adelaide is performing with her dance troupe a ditsy country themed show tune - “I Love You A Bushel and A Peck”. As they talk after the show, Adelaide again pleads with Nathan for wedding date, explaining that she has been writing letters to her mother suggesting they had been married for the last 14 years, and already had a family of 5. One of Adelaide’s friends enters, and lets slip that Nathan is still running the crap game, and Adelaide’s furious reaction is a little odd... she starts to cry – and to sneeze. She has been showing Nathan a book on psychology that she has been reading to explain “why soitin kinds of goils do soitin kinds of things”. Nathan, worried about his investment in Sarah’s decision, has shown some interest, but once he has rushed out of the awkward situation, Adelaide, in her famous “Lament” - explains that she has learned from the book that her chronic cold is a reaction to frustration at Nathan’s continued failure to commit.
- ❖ Benny and Nicely- Nicely have meanwhile been enjoying watching Sky persistently follow the Mission Band, and receive consistent knock-backs from Sarah, but they are concerned that Nathan’s relationship with Adelaide is distracting him from business – they reflect on the unfortunate tendency of men to fall in love with women in the song “Guys and Dolls” and the ensemble join in as a series of object lessons to demonstrate their point.
- ❖ Suddenly, things go Sky’s way when the head of the Mission Organisation turns up with the news that the Broadway branch of the Mission is just not succeeding in saving sinners, and will be closed. Sarah finds herself needing to take Sky up on his offer of bringing in at least “one dozen genuine sinners” to a prayer meeting to be held the following night, and agrees to the Cuba trip.
- ❖ This news does not reach Nathan immediately – all the gamblers have gathered, wearing carnations as a signal, as they wait for confirmation that Sky has left alone for Havana, at which point Nathan would have the money and they could all go to the Garage. But Lieutenant Brannigan arrives, and puts the pressure on everyone, including Big Julie, the visiting Chicago gangster and friend of standover man Harry the Horse. Trying to throw Brannigan off the scent, Benny Southstreet announces that the carnations are in honour of

Nathan's Bachelor dinner, as he and Adelaide are about to elope. At just that moment, Adelaide also arrives, and is overjoyed, planning for them to leave immediately after her final show, also to be held on the following night. Nathan is forced to go along with all of this, and to top it off, is horrified to see the Mission Band pass by again, minus not just Sky, but Sarah as well.

- ❖ In Havana, Sarah tries hard to ignore the exotic atmosphere and the explosion of dance and colour around them. She concentrates on historical guidebooks and orders plain American food – ham sandwich and milkshake, but Sky, trying to get her to relax a little, orders in Spanish, a milk-based cocktail with Bacardi. Sarah quite enjoys them, and drinks a few “milkshakes” – even suggesting they would be a useful way of encouraging children to boost their intake of dairy! She becomes quite uninhibited, getting involved with the whole cast in a big Latin dance number, and reveals her true feelings towards Sky in a jealous “dance-off” with a beautiful Cuban woman, which degenerates into a brawl. She finally shows the warm and expansive personality that had been hidden behind her rigid shell after Sky rescues her, and sings the delightful “If I Were a Bell (I'd be Ringing)”.
- ❖ Sky chivalrously takes her home, but her new open and tender honesty outlasts the alcohol, and touches Sky's untouchable heart. As he escorts her through the pre-dawn streets to the mission, he shares his sensitive and poetic side with her in the beautiful poem set to music “My Time of Day”.
- ❖ The two of them seal the moment with the duet “I've Never Been in Love Before”, but are then shocked when the Mission door opens and all of the gamblers pour out, pursued by Lieutenant Brannigan. It turns out that the Mission Team, led by Sarah's grandfather Arvide Abernathy, have taken Sky's advice, and been out all night “crusading against the devil”, but Nathan, having lost his \$1000 bet, and consequently Joey Biltmore's Garage, has taken advantage and held the crap game in the Mission itself. Sarah, feeling foolish and betrayed, sends Sky away, assuming that he was in on the arrangement, and that the whole Havana trip was just a diversion.
- ❖ Act Two begins at the end of the day that dawned with Sarah and Sky's break-up, as Adelaide performs with the Hot Box dancers – a mock-dramatic “striptease” called “Take Back Your Mink” (don't worry – we are definitely not going that far) and comes out, expecting to find Nathan in the audience ready for their elopement. Instead she finds Nicely-Nicely and Sky. Sky had come expecting to find Nathan and pay him \$1000 – to protect Sarah's reputation, he would claim to have lost the bet and not to have taken her to Havana. Nicely-Nicely had been sent by Nathan with fake excuses which sound all too familiar to Adelaide... In fact, the game is still in progress, because Big Julie is losing, not very gracefully and is forcing the other gamblers (almost at gunpoint) to continue. Adelaide, sneezing again, sees through Nathan's alibi about a sick aunt, and complains to Sky about the pain of loving the wrong person. Knowing from personal experience what she means, Sky leaves to talk to Sarah again. Adelaide reprises her lament.
- ❖ Sarah is bitter and disillusioned, telling Arvide she is ready to quit, but he recognises both Sky's genuine integrity and Sarah's obvious love for him. He advises her, in a sentimental Irish blessing “More I Cannot Wish You”, to take Sky on the value of his real love for her, rather than on appearances and to believe that all the gamblers, especially Sky, will one day be praying instead of playing in the Mission. Sky returns to assure her that he will honour his promises but she turns him away.

- ❖ Sky asks Nicely-Nicely to take him to the crap game, so that he can appeal to the gamblers to attend the prayer meeting and keep the mission from closing. They arrive – in the sewers under New York, after the energetic Crapshooters' Dance, to find the game at an unusual point: Big Julie, using his gun for persuasion is playing with dice "from which he has had the spots removed for luck" but remembers "where the spots formerly were"! Sky settles this with some misdirection and a knockout punch, but the gamblers are not grateful enough to go into a church – until Sky risks everything on a single throw of the dice– if he loses, he pays each man \$1000, but if he wins, they attend the prayer meeting. After a moment of prayer, he appeals to Lady Luck one last time, singing "Luck, be a Lady", and throws the dice.
- ❖ Minutes later, Adelaide orchestrates an "accidental" meeting with Nathan, to rebuke him for missing the elopement. She offers him one last chance, and they are about to reconcile, when Benny and Nicely-Nicely remind him of his commitment. When Nathan tells Adelaide he can't elope because he has to go to a prayer meeting, she is appalled at the "woist" lie he has ever told, and despite his pleas, in the duet "Sue Me" she dumps him.
- ❖ Just as Sarah is about to declare the meeting a write-off, all of the gamblers arrive. Sky, not wanting to make things awkward for Sarah, who continues to treat him coldly, announces he is leaving town, and tells Nathan to be sure that the gamblers behave. The first few "testimonies", however, are fairly mocking and insincere. The tension increases when Lieutenant Brannigan arrives, still suspicious about their presence in the mission. Nathan, hoping to convince him that the meeting is legitimate, calls on Nicely-Nicely, who has been uncharacteristically silent, to give a testimony... and to everyone's surprise, including his own, it is genuine. Everyone, and in our production this includes the Hot Box Girls who have been invited by the gamblers, joins him in a joyous revival number, "Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat".
- ❖ Brannigan breaks the mood, accusing them all of being in the mission the previous night for a crap game. He appeals to Sarah as an eyewitness, and for once, she takes a risk, putting relationship with these potentially reformed sinners ahead of morality. She denies recognising them and Brannigan leaves.
- ❖ Nathan, grateful to Sarah, confesses the truth about his bet with Sky, but tells her he is glad to know he won the bet. Sarah realises both that Sky was not part of Nathan's plot to hold the game in the mission, and that he has lied about losing the bet to protect her. She leaves in search of him, and all the gamblers join in an enthusiastic reprise of "Follow the Fold".
- ❖ Out in the street, Sarah runs into Adelaide and they console each other over their difficult relationships with Sky and Nathan. They decide together that they should concentrate on getting married, rather than trying to make the men perfect first, and Adelaide is overjoyed to learn that Nathan really was at a prayer meeting after all. The girls sing the hilarious "Marry the Man Today" and they exit in search of their men.
- ❖ The finale opens a day or so later – with a nervous Nathan confessing that he has forgotten to arrange another venue – this time for his wedding. The Mission Band appears, complete with the already married Sky and Nicely-Nicely in Mission Uniform. Arvide agrees to marry Nathan and Adelaide in the Mission, and everyone joins in for one last sing of Guys and Dolls.

# Vision

Those of you who were at the Gondoliers after-party would have heard me say already what I love about this show – its optimism, and the determined belief that anyone can be funny, even a Chicago gangster, and anyone can change – a not-so-bright showgirl, a “criminal gambler” or a repressed Christian who needs to learn that right relationships come before right behaviour. That is not to say that the characters are perfect; they are all quite flawed, and much of the plot hinges on the lies they tell to each other or in the end, for each other. But in spite of their flaws, it is such an affectionate portrait of these people and the world they live in.

Some of you may have seen the recent Sydney via Melbourne, via London production. It is a really clever professional show, bringing out the seediness of the neighbourhood and some of the characters, like the drunk, Brandy Bottle Bates, and making Adelaide far more of a genuine stripper in a seedy nightclub than any production before it. The city was pretty dark, stony and grim in their set, and the suits of the gamblers in the clip reflect that worldview – charcoals, greys, pinstripe blacks, occasional flashes of red. I like a lot of those ideas, and they neatly match in with – well, for a start, our budget – the lack of house and instage curtains mean that the dark stonewalls and simplicity of the set work for us, and the majority of our existing costumes do as well. It suits the kind of show I like, where everyone, ensemble and principal, have to have thought through their character and motivations, everyone has a story and a reason to do and say what ever happens on stage (other than because it’s in the script). But I don’t think a strictly realistic style suits this show either... it really isn’t the 1950’s New York of West Side Story, all angst and violence and graffiti.

Some of you might also have seen the Frank Sinatra Movie – with all the changes, it’s a real classic, and was the first thing to make me fall in love with this show. It’s very light and bright, almost cartoonish, with gamblers in suits I’d pretty much have to describe as pastel, and Broadway looking nothing like a red-light district that it has been for much of its history. It’s gorgeous, but not quite right for us either – a bit dated and too far from what a lot more people these days know to be true – and the characterisations sort of match it – broad, comic and almost slapstick. It’s fantasy Broadway.

What we are going for, in our look and in our performance style, is something that’s in between. Not just to be in between, but because I think that is what the Subtitle suggests – a “Musical Fable of Broadway”. It’s not the real, dirty, seedy New York, because audiences who have seen, say *Rent*, or as I say, *West Side Story*, would find that hard to reconcile with the optimism I love about the show, but neither is it a fantasy that has no relation to reality. A fable is truth, but told through the eyes of a lover. Damon Runyon knew the real New York, and my time of day is actually based on his own love of late nights in the city that never sleeps, but he tells the story with a loving, openly rose-coloured vision, one that loves and sees the funny or the generous or the hopeful side of all the underworld characters he paints.

So we are going for a dark background, rounded, thought out characters, but characters who are capable of sudden huge changes that might not suit a strictly realistic play. They are all a little larger than life, and although there are reasons for them to change, the changes are bigger, braver, more complete and immediate than we’d expect. As a result, we want to echo that in the sets – dark, but with panels and flashes of jewel colours, glitter and lights and above what you can see in the sketches, an “upper story” of a silhouetted NY skyline outlined with ropelights against a deep blue (pink for the dawn scenes) skycloth. Same with the costumes – the vision is for mostly dark men’s suits, with bright ties and shirts... maybe some louder suits for the broader comic characters. Women’s costumes can take in all the gorgeous shapes of Dior’s “New Look” – nipped in waists, with either full skirts or pencil skirts with a peplum in the jacket – this is about 1951, so all the glamour of the late 40’s meets the freedom of the early 50’s – capri pants are an option, as are floor sweeping evening gowns, in a similar palette of sober hues, with jewel colours coming through.