

BALLROOM  
Presented by Virginia Musical Theatre  
Sandler Center  
February 6-8, 2009  
For tickets: (757) 340-5446

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

The transformation of the highly praised TV movie "The Queen of the Stardust Ballroom" into a musical was an unprecedented, turbulent and ultimately disastrous ordeal. Michael Bennet was riding high with the smash success of A Chorus Line when he undertook this project. The show was in workshops, rehearsals and previews for an astonishing seven months! There were three different leading ladies, three different leading men and the directors tried eleven different versions of openings for the show. Finally the curtain went up in December of 1979 to overall tepid reviews. It ran for only four months. Millions of dollars were lost.

In the story Bea Asher is a lonely widow who has shut out life after her husband's death. She runs a junk store selling her own possessions among other stuff. She is persuaded to break out of her confinement by a friend and go to the Stardust Ballroom. It's a neighborhood dance hall where there is a "terrific band and a real nice crowd." She meets a most likable and gentle man who is a mail carrier They slowly fall in love. The problem is that he is married. Her family is shocked but she ignores them, singing that 50% of him is better than nothing. There is no moral or dramatic conflict. Carol Kuykendall and Todd Susman are the ill fated couple, Bea and Al. They are well cast and most believable and moving as their pathetic tale unfolds. They are surrounded by a most competent cast.

The just right sounding band is conducted by Andrew Austin. Unfortunately, it is placed on the stage and takes up space needed by choreographer Andrea Andresakis. As a result, the larger numbers look crowded and flat. In general, the staging lacks variety.

Jeff Meredith is a courageous producer. It certainly took daring to take on this musical that has never come together. The reason is that the book is so weak it's barely evident.

My wife and I saw the opening night of Ballroom in New York because we had friends in the company. Shortly after the curtain went up I felt uncomfortable and uneasy. It was like watching the Titanic embark on its maiden voyage with the knowledge of what was going to happen.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.