

# THEATER REVIEW: ‘Drowsy Chaperone’ marks debut of new Salem State theater

## Saturday

Posted Apr 22, 2017 at 2:01 PM

Updated Apr 22, 2017 at 2:01 PM

The Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts opens this weekend at Salem State University. The new center offers a versatile, welcoming space not only for the university’s intrepid theater department, which is christening the hall with a staging of “The Drowsy Chaperone,” but for readings, music and dance.

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

## If you go...

What: “The Drowsy Chaperone”

Where: Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts, Salem State University, 356 Lafayette St., Salem

When: through April 30

Tickets: \$15 general; \$10 students/seniors. Visit [www.salemstatetickets.com](http://www.salemstatetickets.com) or call 978 542-6365.

The Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts opens this weekend at Salem State University. The new center offers a versatile, welcoming space not only for the university’s intrepid theater department, which is christening the hall with a staging of “The Drowsy Chaperone,” but for readings, music and dance.

The center seats about 430, and has a thrust stage, a spacious lobby with seating and good pathways, an intimate balcony and plentiful loge wings. The stage itself is large, and, judging from this opening production, has excellent lighting and technical mechanics. There is an orchestra pit, cut as a rectangle somewhat precariously into the front of the stage.

The interior is purple (if that matters), simple but appealing, especially in the way it welcomes visitors. The exterior façade is also simple, curving around a previous structure along Lafayette Street.

To open the hall, the Salem State players did what they do best—a little bit of everything. “The Drowsy Chaperone” is a meta-musical—a musical about musicals. The staging involves a hokey send-up of 1920s jazz era shows, narrated archly by Man in Chair (the impressive Matthew Lundergan).

The cast sings and dances its way through this marriage comedy, rife with musical theater stereotypes. It would be unwatchable if not for Man in Chair—in fact, everyone would probably walk out in the first 15 minutes if not for Man in Chair.

Lundergan brings to life his kinda broken, lonely and philosophical character. The sympathetic chap sits in his New York apartment, spinning the two-disc recording of a musical he has never seen, but which fills his imagination and fires his musings. He knows every fictional detail, not only of the musical itself but of the actors that populate the stage. The “story” is not “The Drowsy Chaperone,” but Man in Chair’s story about “The Drowsy Chaperone.”

Man in Chair makes us understand right off that the play is camp, and nothing but. That’s a good thing, because he’s right. There is formidable dancing—a tap scene with Stephen Zubricki IV and Sam Nudler (“Cold Feets”) is a phenom, and the two mobsters dressed as pastry chefs who dance and sing “Toledo Surprise” has its moments.

Director David Allen George has it blocked beautifully, and the choreography (Meghan McLyman) is generally solid. The sound balance was faulty—the orchestra in the pit (conducted by Joseph Stroup) mostly overwhelmed the miked-up singing and speaking—but those things will get ironed out in time.

The music is largely stolen—or made to sound stolen. The problem with the book is that the camp never gets up and above the notion of campiness—if it weren’t for Man in Chair, and his world-weary attitude blended with his sheer love of musical theater fantasy, these dancers and singers

might actually think they were performing something entertaining.

But the book and the players are separate items. These actors stand out with their engaging versatility: talented dancers and singers all, with the notion of the send-up firmly in hand.

Zubricki executes a blindfolded roller skating scene—never mind the potted plants and statues he had to avoid, that orchestra pit was gaping there, ready to swallow him up. The pastry gangsters (Mat Stanley, David Picariello), Nikos Koutsogiannis’s suave butler, stand-out singing from Mackenzie Piriee Kimball and Grace Graham—all of them work hard to make this fun.

But this was Lundergan’s show. At turns thoughtful, insecure, piercingly funny and pathetically lonely, he made the preposterous doings, fantastically staged in his own living room, more than palatable for everyone.

With its large cast, all showing off multiple talents, and Lundergan’s rock-solid characterization to rest upon, this was a brilliant choice to kick off the new hall. It’s a certainty there will be more great theater taking place in this room.

The Salem State Theater Department’s “The Drowsy Chaperone” runs through April 30 at Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts, Salem State University, 356 Lafayette St., Salem. Visit [www.salemstatetickets.com](http://www.salemstatetickets.com) or call 978 542-6365.

---

*Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR’s ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to [keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com](mailto:keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com)*

## **THEATER REVIEW: ‘Drowsy Chaperone’ marks debut of new Salem State theater**

**Saturday**

Posted Apr 22, 2017 at 2:01 PM

Updated Apr 22, 2017 at 2:01 PM

The Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts opens this weekend at Salem State University. The new center offers a versatile, welcoming space not only for the university’s intrepid theater

department, which is christening the hall with a staging of “The Drowsy Chaperone,” but for readings, music and dance.

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

### **If you go...**

What: “The Drowsy Chaperone”

Where: Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts, Salem State University, 356 Lafayette St., Salem

When: through April 30

Tickets: \$15 general; \$10 students/seniors. Visit [www.salemstatetickets.com](http://www.salemstatetickets.com) or call 978 542-6365.

The Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts opens this weekend at Salem State University. The new center offers a versatile, welcoming space not only for the university’s intrepid theater department, which is christening the hall with a staging of “The Drowsy Chaperone,” but for readings, music and dance.

The center seats about 430, and has a thrust stage, a spacious lobby with seating and good pathways, an intimate balcony and plentiful loge wings. The stage itself is large, and, judging from this opening production, has excellent lighting and technical mechanics. There is an orchestra pit, cut as a rectangle somewhat precariously into the front of the stage.

The interior is purple (if that matters), simple but appealing, especially in the way it welcomes visitors. The exterior façade is also simple, curving around a previous structure along Lafayette Street.

To open the hall, the Salem State players did what they do best—a little bit of everything. “The Drowsy Chaperone” is a meta-musical—a musical about musicals. The staging involves a hokey send-up of 1920s jazz era shows, narrated archly by Man in Chair (the impressive Matthew Lundergan).

The cast sings and dances its way through this marriage comedy, rife with musical theater stereotypes. It would be unwatchable if not for *Man in Chair*—in fact, everyone would probably walk out in the first 15 minutes if not for *Man in Chair*.

Lundergan brings to life his kinda broken, lonely and philosophical character. The sympathetic chap sits in his New York apartment, spinning the two-disc recording of a musical he has never seen, but which fills his imagination and fires his musings. He knows every fictional detail, not only of the musical itself but of the actors that populate the stage. The “story” is not “*The Drowsy Chaperone*,” but *Man in Chair*’s story about “*The Drowsy Chaperone*.”

*Man in Chair* makes us understand right off that the play is camp, and nothing but. That’s a good thing, because he’s right. There is formidable dancing—a tap scene with Stephen Zubericki IV and Sam Nudler (“*Cold Feet*”) is a phenom, and the two mobsters dressed as pastry chefs who dance and sing “*Toledo Surprise*” has its moments.

Director David Allen George has it blocked beautifully, and the choreography (Meghan McLyman) is generally solid. The sound balance was faulty—the orchestra in the pit (conducted by Joseph Stroup) mostly overwhelmed the miked-up singing and speaking—but those things will get ironed out in time.

The music is largely stolen—or made to sound stolen. The problem with the book is that the camp never gets up and above the notion of campiness—if it weren’t for *Man in Chair*, and his world-weary attitude blended with his sheer love of musical theater fantasy, these dancers and singers might actually think they were performing something entertaining.

But the book and the players are separate items. These actors stand out with their engaging versatility: talented dancers and singers all, with the notion of the send-up firmly in hand.

Zubericki executes a blindfolded roller skating scene—never mind the potted plants and statues he had to avoid, that orchestra pit was gaping there, ready to swallow him up. The pastry gangsters (Mat Stanley, David Picariello), Nikos Koutsogiannis’s suave butler, stand-out singing from Mackenzie Piriee Kimball and Grace Graham—all of them work hard to make this fun.

But this was Lundergan’s show. At turns thoughtful, insecure, piercingly funny and pathetically lonely, he made the preposterous doings, fantastically staged in his own living room, more than palatable for everyone.

With its large cast, all showing off multiple talents, and Lundergan's rock-solid characterization to rest upon, this was a brilliant choice to kick off the new hall. It's a certainty there will be more great theater taking place in this room.

The Salem State Theater Department's "The Drowsy Chaperone" runs through April 30 at Sophia Gordon Center for Creative and Performing Arts, Salem State University, 356 Lafayette St., Salem. Visit **[www.salemstatetickets.com](http://www.salemstatetickets.com)** or call 978 542-6365.

---

*Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to [keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com](mailto:keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com)*