

Jazzy Fun

By Paul Clifton-Waite
Cabinet Press reporter

MILFORD—If asked about jazz, many people would no doubt give the stock reply: I know what I like.

And the kind of jazz many people like is big band swing, the sound that swept the country in the 1930s and '40s. Both punchy and catchy, swing continues to capture people's imaginations. Just look at pop superstar Phil Collins' latest album.

So it is no surprise that the American Stage Festival's swing celebration, "The All Night Strut" is a winner. But it is not merely the music that brings this one in for a standing ovation.

While the three-piece band backing this tightly-delivered musical is worthy of superlative praise, it is the four-person song and dance team that makes the production a not-want-to-miss.

Dancers Gregg W. Goodbrod, Lyn Philistine, Dennis Stowe and Debra Walton swing with not only grace and style, but personality and pizzazz that make you think you're in Manhattan rather than Milford.

Simply, they are a joy to watch and hear. This is no boring, overdone Riverdance military maneuvering. This is the dance of American swingers, frolicking through life with kicks and smiles, twirls and jive.

They're having fun

They are clearly having fun as they romp through such classic fare as "Fascinatin' Rhythm," "Minnie the Moocher," "Chattanooga Choo-Choo," "In the Mood," "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "It Don't Mean A Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing."

Of course, Strut is not so one dimensional or shallow to focus solely on the upbeat. Director and choreographer Jim Weaver,

'Strut' a hit at ASF

From Page 17

has crafted a show of depth that in nearly 30 songs pays a very fitting historical tribute to swing.

He's tossed in romantic ballads such as "I'll Be Seeing You," "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square," and "White Cliffs of Dover" and added a touch of pathos with "Brother Can You Spare a Dime." On that latter piece, Stowe is simply mesmerizing.

Weaver has also thrown in a patriotic medley comprised of "Rosie the Riveter," "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" and "Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer." With additions like "GI Jive" and "I'll Be Seeing You," "Strut" nicely reminds us how all-captivating World War II was for this country.

There are more than a couple of references to the bootleg, speak-easy days of Prohibition, with "Java Jive" and "Gimme A Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer." Walton serves up the latter with infectious spirit, as she does with some of the other gospel-tinged numbers.

A special treat

Walton and Stowe are clear masters of their art, and Goodbrod and Philistine are more than competent. It's clear why all have previously been featured on Broadway. The four are a special treat and bring alive even the lesser known songs such as "Beat Me, Daddy, Eight to the Bar" and "Juke Box Saturday Night."

They are assisted in their de-

livery by glorious and minutely detailed costuming and a stunning art deco set, the latter of which Hollis scenic artist Charles F. Morgan has rendered with a masterful touch.

In so many ways, this show demands attention and deserves to be seen and heard. It also allows one to forgive ASF's decision not to back the production with a full orchestra of winds and horns. That would have been the crowning achievement.

But it's easy to enjoy "Strut" without full the regalia of a swing band. To paraphrase another jazz reference, Johnny may not like jazz, but he's sure to like this jazzed-up production.