

Alhambra Theatre & Dining: I'm crazy for you



Provided by Alhambra Theatre and Dining

Crazy For You features Erin Dowling as 'Polly Baker' with Ensemble

Leigh Cort Columnist

To a New York theater junkie and actress like me, having the Alhambra Theatre & Dining in Jacksonville is nirvana. Our cherished professional theater isn't just a local venue to see shows and pair it with dinner. The Alhambra (Theatre & Dining) is an American icon that has been continuously operating since 1967, nationally acclaimed as one of the very few (and best) remaining dinner theaters featuring Equity players.

Founded in 1913, Equity is the labor union that represents more than 49,000 Actors and Stage Managers in the U.S. A professional organization, Actors' Equity is a member of the AFL-CIO and is affiliated with FIA (an international organization of performing arts unions).

Arriving at the Beach Boulevard



Leigh Cort
Table Talk

to what portended for the evening. Bartender Bobby Began (working at the Alhambra for 28 years) mixed my "Crazy-Tini," created as a signature cocktail for "Crazy for You," along with an "I've Got Rhythm" cocktail for my guest. We chuckled at the clever descriptions — something the Alhambra has been offering for quite a few years. Dominic Windsor, director of special events, collaborates

landmark, I marveled at the stunning new exterior and gracious gentleman who opens the front door with a very warm welcome. The Library Lounge was a delightfully fun introduction

with Bobby on the bar menu prior to each show of the season which adds a bit of show "biz" and fun.

Escorted to our table in the theater dining room, I noticed a lovely glow throughout, tables set beautifully and a feeling of pizzazz on each of four tiers. Unlike a proscenium stage, the Alhambra's tiered seating is perfectly crafted in a comfortable square U, affording each guest excellent stage views no matter where you're seated for dining and show. Our server Paul Nickas, another 25+ year veteran of the Alhambra, made us feel like VIP celebs with his attentive and caring service all evening.

What a surprise to read the dinner menu options — proudly prepared by Executive Chef DeJuan Roy. A graduate of the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago, he brings to the Alhambra nearly 20

years of culinary expertise in AAA Five-Diamond restaurants, private clubs, Mobil Five-Star dining and inns throughout Europe and the U.S.

"I'm enjoying the opportunity to work alongside owner Craig Smith and help him fulfill the dreams of the North Florida community by creating a new culinary experience every six to nine weeks. From service to food, we strive to be the best dine-in theater in the country," he said.

Guests choose one selection from each of the following courses:

- First Course: Sardi's Split Pea Soup or Mixed Green Salad with candied walnuts, dried cherries, balsamic dressing and a goat cheese fritter
- Second Course: Chicken Parmesan served over spaghetti and broccoli; Oven Braised Beef with creamy Italian polenta and green beans; Garlic Shrimp Gratin with



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creamy leeks and rice pilaf; or Spinach Cannelloni served with a trio of sauces

- Third Course: Authentic Limoncello Cake or Trio of Cannoli, featuring Kahlua and Cocoa, Blood Orange and Traditional

When I realized that we were enjoying a musical in the same theater where performers like Betty Grable, Dorothy Lamour, Martha Raye, Cyd Charisse and Sally Struthers have danced gracefully across the stage, there was an exciting chill that shivered on my neck.

And the magic wasn't just due to the Alhambra's pedigree from yesteryear. Owner Craig Smith, partners and 70 staff members now create thrilling theater events every night of the season!

With an illustrious history, today's actors come from around the coun-

try to audition, many of whom have worked on Broadway and perform on international tours. The Alhambra continues to carve its niche in theater lore — especially when you consider the current musical "Crazy for You."

The show opened on Broadway in 1992, receiving critical acclaim as being "modern and old fashioned all at the same time." With a big cast of 19, a beautiful set and a landslide of Gershwin songs, the set designer (Jason Coale) was brought in from Kansas City and choreographer (James Kinney) returns home to Jacksonville as he juggles other theater projects in New York.

The show runs through May 5 followed by "Murder Among Friends" starring Loretta Swit through June 9.

Although the show almost trans-



Provided by Jay Greene

Plump, juicy and tastefully prepared Chicken Parmesan

Table Talk

Continued from 15

ports you to Broadway and Shubert Alley, there is a hometown warmth and charm shared throughout the evening.

Craig Smith personally introduces the show from the stage — acknowledging birthdays, anniversaries, overseas guests — as homespun as if he were a neighbor from Mayberry.

He's a genuinely gracious host who appreciates his guests, sharing tidbits of show business buzz about many of the big name celebrities past and future who have graced the Alhambra dressing rooms and stage.

"The Alhambra was so special to my family as it to so many, I could not dare to see it go away. It was our daddy/daughter date spot," he said.

The 374-seat theater opens its doors for daytime or evening events for groups who opt to plan a gather-



Provided by Leigh Cort

Playbills from 1920s New York (from Leigh Cort's collection)

ing with or without the current show production. Imagine inviting your friends and associates to their own private soiree and having the opportunity to stand on the show stage and become a part of the production — not singing or dancing!

As I browsed through the Library's books, photo albums and memorabilia, it became apparent that friends and patrons of the Alhambra feel the same way I do about the American Theater legacy. Having my own personal collection of Broadway playbills from the 1920s (one of which includes Humphrey Bogart in a supporting role), musical librettos and vintage scripts from dramas and comedies, I'm anxious to share some of these treasures with Craig

and family! Hopefully at some time this year he will unveil his collection at the Alhambra. He had a twinkle in his eye as he related a story about J.D. Salinger who was at the theater visiting his then girlfriend, an actress in one of the shows. A photo of the famous author appeared shortly thereafter in the L.A. Times — featuring Salinger's night at the Alhambra!

I love the new Alhambra Theatre & Dining. One of my favorite Rodgers & Hammerstein musicals is opening October 23 — "South Pacific."

I'm sure it's going to be an enchanted evening every time the curtain goes up — so perhaps you'll join me at my table for four while we sip a "Bali Hai Breeze!"

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