

'Gypsy' opens the 27th season at Danbury's Richter Park

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Mama Rose (Martha Lerman of Bethel, in pink robe at center) makes plans for her daughters and their performing troupe in "Gypsy," Jule Styne and Stephen Sondheim's brassy show business portrait, playing outdoors under the stars through July 2 at Danbury's Musicals at Richter. Shows are on the grounds of the Richter Arts Center, 100 Aunt Hack Road, in Danbury (next to Richter Park Golf Course) Friday through Sunday evenings through Saturday, July 2 at 8:30 p.m. Grounds open at 7:15 for picnicking; snack concession and chair rentals are available onsite. Tickets are \$23 for adults, \$18 for seniors, and \$15 for students and children. Special rates Sunday, June 26: \$18 for adults, \$14 for seniors, and \$12 for students and children. For reservations and further information, visit www.musicalsatrichter.org, leave a message at 203-748-6873 or e-mail info@musicalsatrichter.org. Left to right with Lerman are Keenan Martin, Rose Bisogno, Bobby Eddy, Megan Corcoran, Sammy Panzarino, Billy Hicks and James Hussey. Photo: Contributed Photo, Contributed Photo/David Henningsen

Hold onto your hats! Musicals at Richter has opened its 2011 season with "Gypsy," one of the most memorable shows of [American Musical Theater](#) in the last century -- and maybe even in this one.

Make no mistake about it. "Gypsy" may have had a power team of notable originators, like [David Merrick](#), [Jule Styne](#), [Stephen Sondheim](#), [Jerome Robbins](#) and [Ethel Merman](#) -- to name a few. But the musical tells a wrenching story about a mother's driving ambition to make stars of her two daughters. By doing so, she confuses her own life goals with theirs, and finally comes to realize this.

It's around mother Rose's complex personal aims that everything else revolves. The caliber of the musical numbers and performances take on newer meanings because of this. It's Rose's personality that enhances everything else, including songs like "Some People," "Rose's Turn"

and "Everything's Coming Up Roses." One critic felt the show was the closest thing to Shakespeare's "King Lear" of any musical to date.

From 1959 when "Gypsy" premiered, to its 2008 revival, the musical garnered 42 Tony, Drama desk, and Outer Critics' Circle awards for everything from performance to sound design. Musicals at Richter Park couldn't have made a better choice to open its new season.

Every production of "Gypsy" revolves around its central character, Rose, mother of "Baby June" (later to become the actress [June Havoc](#)) and "Louise" (later to become stripper Gypsy Rose Lee).

In [Donald E. Birely's](#) Richter Park production of the show, [Elle Sauli](#) and [Kimberly Wipfer](#) alternate the role of Baby June as a child, while [Rose Bisogno](#) is the older version of the daughter who elopes to free herself from her mother's influence.

The other daughter, Louise, slated to become the most famous stripper in the world, is played alternately by [Sarah Baker](#) and [Lindsay Cronin](#) as a child, and by the attractive [Megan Corcoran](#) in later years.

The lead role of Rose is performed by [Martha Lerman](#), who invested it with all the conniving energy it deserves.

Any way you look at it, Rose's taste in musical numbers leaves much to be desired. She has Louise perform the insipid "Let Me Entertain You" continually, while audiences may well wonder whether the death of vaudeville was given a capable assist through her efforts.

Special mention should be made of the performances of [Jody Bayer](#), [Jessica Smith](#), and [Lauryn Linley](#) as the strippers [Tessie Tura](#), [Electra](#), and [Mazzepa](#), a trio of accomplished bump-and-grind artistes, lending some welcome relief to the dark subtext of this musical.

The cast of more than 40 performers steps forward to have one whale of a time assisting the principals.

In the original version of the show, Louise abandons her mother like so many others Rose has dominated, rather than reconciling with her on her own independent terms. Audiences will have to judge which of these two endings is the more poignant one.

"Gypsy" runs through July 2 at Musicals at Richter, 100 Aunt [Hack Road](#), Danbury. Performances are on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays at 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$23 for adults, \$18 for seniors, and \$15 for students and children. They can be purchased by calling the box office at 203-748-6873, or contacting info@musicalsatrichter.org.