Going Down Swingin', 10/5

At this moment, when I hear the phrase, "Going Down Swingin'," I think of the Yankees already losing 2 of their playoff games, partially because of bugs. But fortunately, in this case, "Going Down Swingin'" refers to a well written musical.

It's 1956, and television is beginning to overtake radio in the entertainment industry. The best radio shows are being moved to TV, and that's exactly the fate that Dean Newhouse (Christopher Shyer) wants for his show. Dean is a narcissistic, selfish, womanizer. His show consists of: his "second banana" for years (James Stovall), who is ready to move on; a soap star (Marla Schaffel), who has been one of Dean's past lady-victims; an up-and-coming rock star (Leo Ash Evans), who possibly has a secret, a 28-year old former teen star still playing a 16-year old (Tom Deckman); a new naïve girl from a small town (Stacie Bono), who Dean attempts to put the moves on, and a performer who is onto Dean, and has aspirations for both herself and for Dean's demise (Meredith Patterson).

Act 1 follows the rehearsal of an episode of "The Dean Newhouse Show," while act 2 consists of a live performance of the show, one week later. This structure is effective, as all of the backstage relationships can be established in the first act, but, of course, any backstage drama that interferes with the live broadcast results in hilarity. The story is strong and captivating, though some of the radio skits are more entertaining than others.

The show has been creatively adapted from Mozart's opera, Don Giovanni. It sticks very close to its source material, and some of the more famous opera songs are transformed into a more modern song in the score. But what is really admirable about this show is that it didn't just attempt to adapt and update Don Giovanni, but added in other relevant issues, such as the beginning of television and the fall of radio, and also brings up the issue of the rarity of Black people on television in the 50's. The way the show is cleverly structured, it can be appreciated greatly by both Don Giovanni fans, and by those who have never heard of the opera before.

The interesting aspect about the score of Going Down Swingin' is that all of the songs are confined to the context of the radio show. Characters do not randomly burst into song to express their

emotions; but rather, they sing songs for the radio program. Of course, these songs often do cleverly relate to the characters' feelings and emotions, Perhaps the most effective of these songs is the beautiful, revealing 11 o'clock number, sung wonderfully by Meredith Patterson.

A masterful performance is turned in by Christopher Shyer as Dean Newhouse. He establishes all of the important qualities of Dean – the aforementioned bad qualities, but also an incredible amount of charm, so you can understand why girls fall for Dean, and why Willie has remained with Dean all this time. Shyer's performance at the climax of the show is nothing short of brilliant. Special mention should also go to James Stovall as Willie, who's huge smile and gorgeous voice and versatile movements absolutely light up the stage.

Going Down Swingin' is a very tight musical. The songs integrate with the plot the way they are supposed to, characters are developed, the story holds your attention. These aspects, combined with strong performances all around help to make it one of best shows of the festival.