

Monterey County
The Herald

MPC Theatre Co. delivers highly entertaining 'Plaza Suite'

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The MPC Theatre Company's brilliantly acted and directed side-splitting realization of Neil Simon's "Plaza Suite," which uses its setting to tie together three widely disparate yet highly comedic human relationships, makes for a delightful theatrical experience.

Love, marriage, honesty, maturity, sex — you name it — are all familiar themes present in a script which is highly entertaining.

Director De Bono had a sterling cast to work with. The sheer professionalism of his actors shone through at all times, no matter what situation they had to bring to life, and their wit and humor twinkled and brought out the available material to excellent effect.

Actually, "Plaza Suite" consists of three one-act plays which are complete entities, but which occupy the same space.

Room 719 as such, is only important in the opening act. Teresa Del Piero has reserved it in order to spend the night where she and her husband spent their honeymoon. However, 23 years later, the bloom of their marriage has disappeared.

Del Piero's role is written so that she apparently lives in a state of confusion as to dates, ages and numbers in general.

She has to overcome the perversities of the role the author has created in order to evoke sympathy for herself.

She is a very polished actress who inhabits a difficult and sometimes frustrating part and does it with charm and an underlying strength.

As the no-longer-loving husband, James Brady ably projects self-centered vanity and selfishness as he demonstrates his withdrawal from his marriage.

Room 719 means nothing to him since he has found another romantic interest and coldly acts accordingly.

In Act 2, Brady is cast as a successful Hollywood director in New York on business and who looks up his high school sweetheart of 17 years ago, hoping for a little afternoon dalliance. He neatly plays down and restrains his wolfishness, but his egotism comes through.

When Jennifer Muniz, married and the mother of three, arrives, she is apparently unsophisticated and shows an almost childish awareness of his stature and success. She reads all the fan magazines and knows every detail of his activities.

Brady is a smooth seducer and Muniz is an amusingly tipsy and willing victim. Together they go through all the motions leading to a final stage blackout in the bedroom.

But then comes Act 3, where the author goes all out in a splendidly human and unbridled, hilarious climax to the occupancy of room 719.

Even though the humor was prominent in the first two acts, here it is nonstop and borders on slapstick comedy.

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The parents of a bride who has gotten cold feet just minutes before her very elaborate and expensive wedding and locked herself in the bathroom, are magnificently personified by Denise Guarneri and Gary Bolen.

They totally engage attention as they colorfully and humanly vent their frustrations and anger at the moment of truth.

Guarneri, as the mother who tries to be sweet and sensible while trying to convince the bride to come out, and Bolen, vacillating between the heavy father counting costs and then physically to reach the recalcitrant bride, are marvels of pitch-perfect timing and their physical activity is totally hilarious.

Actually, this act alone would be worth the price of a ticket, but there is much to commend in the first two acts of what turns out to be a somewhat uneven vehicle.

Laugh-provoking one-liners are present throughout each act and point out with typical Simon humor the human elements of each story.

The supporting cast is as polished and professional as the major players.

Taylor Thorngate appears as a man hunting secretary and again as the reluctant bride. Brady Shilstone is an understanding bell hop and later is the masterful bridegroom. Jeremy Rutter is a sympathetic waiter. All do very well.

Nicole Bryant Stephens' design for Room 719 is handsome and the view of lit up skyscrapers is a clever and impressive detail.

Gloria Mattos Hughes' costumes are very appropriate, particularly in the third act. The bride is beautiful.

So, take a trip to the Plaza Hotel, Suite 719 and relax, laugh and enjoy the show. GO!

THEATER OPENING -What: Monterey Peninsula College Theatre Company presents Neil Simon's "Plaza Suite" -Where: Morgan Stock Stage, Monterey Peninsula College, 980 Fremont St., Monterey -When: Continues at 7p.m. Thursdays, 8p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 2p.m. Sundays through May 18 -Tickets: \$18 in advance, \$25 at the door, seniors \$20, young adults (20 and under) \$15, children under 12 \$10, available by calling 646-4213 from 3-7p.m. Wednesday-Friday or online at www.ticketguys.com -Information: 646-4213 or www.mpctheatrecoco.com

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