

Accomplished, top-notch cast makes for very good 'Company'

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The Monterey Peninsula College Theatre Company is presenting a smartly conceived and staged production of Stephen Sondheim's groundbreaking musical "Company."

This show, now nearly 40 years old, departed from the well-loved formulas prevalent at the time of popular musicals with well-paced plots and tuneful songs.

This show adopted a highly adult attitude as it dealt with the complications of the human relationships in and out of marriage in a sophisticated New York City atmosphere.

There is no development of a story line. "Company" consists of a set of skits showing the interactions of a single, uncommitted man who is a close friend of five different couples who are connected through their friendship with him.

Jared Hussey (Bobby) is the central figure of the show. His 35th birthday is the pivot of the action and the thread that binds the action together.

He is an admirable protagonist whose strong and very pleasingly projected voice, sympathetic role-playing and fine attention to the details and demands of his role were very important in giving meaning to the problems beneath the smooth surface of the veneer he presents as his public face.

In a program note we are told that "The scenes in

the play take place in Bobby's imagination and memory in the moments before his 35th birthday party."

As a result, there is no time line and, as an unusual touch, the audience is asked to imagine Bobby's attempts at blowing out the candles on his birthday cake three times, even though his contacts with the cake are not real.

Each of the five couples have their own eccentricities that focus on their marital problems and Bobby is an observer or only slightly involved with each of them. He mainly sees their negative aspects.

Jennifer L. Newman (Sarah) and James Brady (Harry) are thoroughly convincing as the couple with weaknesses of self-control.

He is an alcoholic and she is an overeater. They end up beating each other up in a hilarious karate match.

Alyca Tanner (Susan) and Keith Wolhart (Peter) are an unusual couple in that they are getting a divorce, but end up living together afterwards very happily and tenderly affectionate.

There then is a scene where Jenny (Michelle Boulware) and David (Sean Boulware) experiment with marijuana with Bobby. Their portrayal of being stoned was (I guess) quite accurate and very funny.

Kristin Brownstone, as the highly neurotic Amy, decides in a wildly high-flying patter song "I'm Not Getting Married Today," a real showstopper.

She was ably supported by Jayar Walker as a devoted and loving future husband after she calms down and changes her mind.

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The fifth and most solidly grounded couple, Phyllis Davis as the inebriated Joanne, who gives an unforgettable and polished performance of "The Ladies Who Lunch," and Mitchell Davis as Larry, who anchors her and is sensibly in control and takes charge of her because he loves her, were a mature and sympathetic pair.

Bobby, who is constantly being urged by his friends to get married, has three girlfriends. There is Kathy

(Natalie Hall), who tenderly tells him how he missed his chance with her.

Then there is Marta, played by Zenaida Nieves-Lee, who does a firebrand performance of "Another Hundred People"; and finally Tara Marie Lucido as April, a clueless sweet airline stewardess whose song "Barcelona" had a yearning quality.

Director Gary Bolen moved his highly accomplished, top-notch cast around very fluidly and effectively.

Whether they were playing their individual scenes, or singing in chorus and even dancing in a chorus line,

they were polished and attentive participants in some rather complex and clever maneuvers.

Anne Marie Hunter's choreography was delightful and augmented the humor of the production.

Eric Maximoff's scenic design was a striking New York skyline that was handsome and elegant. The set elements were very cleverly thought through and flexible, making the many scene changes go very quickly.

As always, Barney Hulse and his musicians

provided solid support for the fine voices in the cast.

There was an underlying wistfulness in this production, which gave it a sense of humanity that enriched a

rather stereotyped, two-dimensional set of characters.

Whether you like Sondheim or not, this is a high-quality achievement, and as such is well worth an

effort to experience its many entertaining aspects.

Nathalie Plotkin can be reached at nanoplotkin@redshift.com . GO!

THEATER REVIEW ·What: MPC Theatre presents Stephen Sondheim's "Company" ·Where: Morgan Stock Stage, Monterey Peninsula College, 980 Fremont St., Monterey ·When: Continues at 7 p.m. Thursday, May 14; 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 2p.m. Sunday, May 8-24 ·Tickets: \$25, \$20 for seniors, \$15 for young adults (16-25) and \$10 for children (15 and under), at MPC Box Office (646-4213) 3-7 p.m Wed-Fri. and two hours prior to each show, or online at www.TicketGuys.com ·Information: 646-4213 or www.mpctheatre.com

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