

MPC Theatre Company returns to renovated Morgan Stock Stage with comedy 'Light Up the Sky'

By *MARC CABRERA Herald Staff Writer Monterey County Herald*

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After two years living out of traveling cases, staging productions all across the Peninsula and enduring the painful loss of its beloved founder Morgan Stock, the Monterey Peninsula College Theatre Company has found its way back home.

This week, it reconnects with loyal patrons with its soft opening of the three-act domestic comedy "Light Up The Sky," previewing Thursday before beginning its official run Friday. It runs through May 26.

Written by award-winning 20th century play and screenwriter Moss Hart, "Light Up The Sky" focuses on the backstage antics of a new play that initially appears to be a hit.

When things go awry and the production appears doomed, the principals — actor, director, producer and playwright — turn against one another, only to be forced to reconcile once the rave reviews come in and the play turns into a success.

Gary Bolen, MPC theatre arts department chairman and the show's director, said he was determined to direct the first show produced on the newly renovated stage.

"After all we've been through, there was no way I was going to let someone else direct the first play in this theater," said Bolen with a smile. "Even if I was in an iron lung, I was going to have them roll me down there."

Bolen said "Light Up The Sky" seemed ideal as the inaugural production for the new stage, for several reasons.

Hart's play has been a popular and successful draw since it was first produced in 1948. It's a technically simple play with one set, a small cast, and few elements of sound and lighting.

"There are a lot of technical intricacies when you open up a building like this," said Bolen. "And if you open up with something like a huge musical, that has a lot of technical demands, you're going to find out, and probably not the way you want to, what has gone wrong."

Bolen assembled a veteran cast to handle the "little bumps in the road," as he termed it.

The cast of local veteran performers includes James Brady, Mitchell and Phyllis Davis, Teresa Del Piero, Keith Decker and Alexandra Bristow.

The cast and crew has endured some foibles in opening the new building. Bolen made light of his team's naivete in believing it could immediately begin rehearsals with full lights and stage from day one.

"We thought we were going to have the set-up, and the lights and everything, and we could rehearse the entire time on the set," Bolen said. "Cut to two and a half weeks later and we were still unable to have the set-up because of things happening with leveling the (stage) floor."

Another mishap occurred when the tech crew tested out the stage's electrical system during rehearsal. The fire curtain, which stands between the audience and the stage, came down and it could not be brought back up.

As recently as the weekend before opening night, the crew endured a heat wave with no air conditioning.

"There's no such thing as a simple play. There are always things that happen," said Bolen.

Bolen had high praise for his technical crew, including technical director Dan Beck, master carpenter Eric Maximoff and master electrician Steve Retsky. The technical team has patiently built and struck and rebuilt and re-struck sets

Even with the building re-opening, the tech crew still had to build sets offstage because of the floor situation.

"Once we got the go-ahead to load things on stage, they were ready to go," said Bolen. "They've really done an outstanding job. This is a backstage comedy, so what people aren't seeing is all the stuff that goes on backstage and has been going on the last two years we've been out of the building."

Now, after a long wait, Bolen is eager to re-introduce local theater enthusiasts to his company's new stage.

"I think we've got a really special place now. A lot of the people that have worked with us over the years and have now seen the building, their jaws just drop when they see the renovations that have happened," said Bolen.

He continued, "I'm really looking forward to seeing those first patrons walk through the door. That for me will be the 'We're back' moment. The reason we do this is to bring professional quality theater to the Peninsula. When people walk through the door to see this first show, then we'll (officially) be back."

Follow Marcos Cabrera on Twitter at [Twitter.com/MarcosACabrera](https://twitter.com/MarcosACabrera). He can be reached at 646-4345 or mcabrera@montereyherald.com. GO!

THEATER OPENING

- What: Monterey Peninsula College Theatre Company presents "Light Up The Sky," by Moss Hart
 - Where: The Morgan Stock Stage at Monterey Peninsula College, 980 Fremont St., Monterey
 - When: Preview performance at 7:30p.m. Thursday, May 9. Opening night at 7:30p.m. Friday, May 10. Regular performances are at 7:30p.m. Thu-Sat, 2p.m. Sunday through May 26
 - Tickets: \$25 general, \$22 seniors, \$15 young adults age 16-21, \$10 children 15 and under, at www.mpctheatre.com, at the MPC Box Office at 646-4213, or in person at the box office, 3-7p.m. Wed-Fri.
 - Information: www.MPCTheatre.com
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