

'Side by Side' isn't together

By ETHEL SIMMONS

"Side by Side by Sondheim" at the Birmingham Theatre is a musical revue with some fine voices including Peggy Lee's, yet it leaves a lot to be desired.

This all-new version of the Broadway hit features Ms. Lee singing about a dozen of Stephen Sondheim's hit and a foursome — two men and two women — sharing the stage for most of the many other musical selections.

The pre-Broadway run continues through July 20. This is the first stage production for blonde, sultry Peggy Lee, and her performance comes across with the super club styling and pop-jazz vocalizing she is known for.

THE SPRIGHTLY singers, Teri Raiston, George Lee Andrews, Marti Morris and Eric Gillett, have that slick Broadway, upbeat rhythm, and they deliver the Sondheim lyrics distinctly, with mellow voices on the melodies. Cast in the role of narrator, Ms. Lee sits at one side of the stage during most of the production, reading background material on the life of Stephen Sondheim to the audience.

Her speaking voice is not particularly strong and expressive. The lights

review

sometimes wash out the pale face and platinum hair, leaving Ms. Lee looking rather ghostly.

Her sensual, pulsated energy on the numbers she does is in marked contrast with the kind of energy used by the other performers. It seems like we're watching two shows together here, and the difference is not necessarily in Ms. Lee's favor.

Her stage movements are not as natural looking as those of the four singers. With arm and body movement keyed to her songs, Ms. Lee looks the professional she is, but her performance lacks real choreography.

ONE NUMBER she does with a feather bo is painfully exaggerated. Another number, where the two other women singers unwind from a boa, seems overly coy.

But, as is pointed out in the show, the song's the thing. And there is little distraction from the tunes presented, although we would have welcomed a few more clever touches in a show billed as a revue.

Sondheim fans will have their fill, with numbers from "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," "Gypsy," "Company," "A Little Night Music," "Follies," "Evening Primrose," "Anyone Can Whistle," "Do I Hear a Waltz?" "Pacific Overtures," "Sweeney Todd" and "The Mad Show."

Many of the names of Sondheim's Broadway shows light up in colorful neon, backdropping the finale. A ring of footlights and circle of lights overhead winks throughout this lively closing number, in which the entire cast participates.

Even the musicians playing the twin pianos and the bass come down from their perch on stage, startingly, to join the singing and dancing in "Everybody Ought to Have a Maid."

THE AUDIENCE appeared to be quite amused by this, and it does have a humorous surprise quality, yet seems amateurish.

Peggy Lee turns poignant with "I Remember Sky," a tender ballad with an edge (that most Sondheim songs have) about remembrances of youth. Her most-applauded number was "I'm Still Here," from "Follies," which she does in the second act.

The song underscores the presence of this longtime star, who has stayed on top with her musical ability. Swathed in a gown with long, flowing, fur-edged sleeves and draped jacket, Ms. Lee gives the appearance of being maybe heavier than she really is.

The evening includes 34 songs, plus 18 more wrapped up in the finale. The show with the most songs represented is "Company," "Another Hundred People" about the rigors of life in New York is one of the many good songs by blonde Teri Raiston. Brunette Marti Morris does especially well by "Getting Married Today," a nervous bride's song with rapid-fire lyrics.



Jack Nicholson overacts outrageously as man driven mad in Stanley Kubrick's horror film "The Shining."

the movies
Louise Snider

Jack Nicholson hams up screen in 'The Shining'

Sometimes the specters walk at noon — in bright light, in spacious rooms. That's how Stanley Kubrick has shaped "The Shining" (R).

He's taken Stephen King's novel of suspense and the supernatural and given it a powerful visual. Kubrick, who masterminded "2001" and "Clockwork Orange," as well as the epic but less successful "Barry Lyndon," is an innovator, not an imitator. His closest concession to the typical Gothic mode is a snow-shrouded hotel with one luminous yellow light slicing through the blue-gray night.

Otherwise, the film is amazingly original in its use of space, light and settings.

THE MOST STRIKING of these sets is the Overlook, conceived as a hotel of vast proportions on an isolated site in the Colorado Rockies.

Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) has come to the hotel as winter caretaker and brought his wife Wendy (Shelley Duvall) and 7-year-old son Danny (Danny Lloyd) with him. Torrance smiles when the manager tells him that a previous caretaker went berserk and chopped up his wife and children, then killed himself.

No danger of that happening to him, Torrance affirms. After all, he's looking forward to the isolation so he can concentrate on his writing.

Initially, the threesome seem quite normal as they settle in to their winter retreat. But the Overlook is a place where strange things happen, and people change. Every color, every piece of furniture, every lighting effect has been meticulously selected to contribute toward an atmosphere that becomes more and more ominous.

"It's just the story of one man's family quietly going insane together," Kubrick told an interviewer. And that's just how Kubrick develops the story and builds suspense.

UNHURRIEDLY, piece by piece, a course of action is set into motion that seems inevitable. Torrance becomes short tempered, starts to drink, sees visions. Then a wallowing blizzard takes hold and knocks down phone lines.

Finally, Torrance completely isolates his family by cutting off all communications with the outside world. He disables the CB radio and the snowmobile, and the stage is set for the chilling climax.

People who have read King's novel say they couldn't put it down: it was so engrossing. Kubrick's film has the same quality, yet it is not entirely satisfying.

For one thing, there are logical inconsistencies which are puzzling, even in a film that deals with the supernatural. Torrance's escape from the hotel's booted meat locker is one of these puzzles. Are we to assume that a spirit released him, since the only people there, his wife and child, didn't?

The most disturbing quality about the film, however, is Jack Nicholson's performance. The exaggerated facial expressions resemble the overacting of silent screen stars.

AS THE MALEVOLENT psychotic, he's marvelous — a comic, demonic Lucifer. But as Jack Torrance before and during his disintegration, all that mugging and leaning up to an outrageously hammy performance that, at times, makes a serious film seem like camp.

For these reasons, "The Shining" is not "the ultimate horror film" as touted, but it's certainly a darn good one.

what's at the movies

- BRONCO BILLY (PG).** Clint Eastwood stars as rowdy, brawling owner of Wild West show.
- BRUBAKER (R).** Serious drama with Robert Redford as reform warden fighting corruption on state prison.
- THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (PG).** "Star Wars" sequel unites original cast in continuation of battle against the evil empire.
- FAME (R).** Lots of young talent in vibrant musical about students at New York's School of Performing Arts.
- FRIDAY THE 13TH (R).** A case of overkill as counselors reopen camp closed since a series of vicious murders.
- THE HOLLYWOOD KNIGHTS (R).** Comedy about young men fighting to save their hangout from the wrecker's ball.
- THE ISLAND (R).** Butcherly galore as Michael Caine investigates ship disappearances and finds a modern-day piracy in Caribbean.
- ROUGH CUT (R).** Diamond thief Burt Reynolds falls for Scotland Yard decoy Leslie-Anne Down.
- THE SHINING (R).** Stanley Kubrick fashions ultimate horror film where ordinary becomes ominous, and Jack Nicholson's psychotic evokes both fear and laughter.

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