

Uneven performances mar Sondheim show

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Side by Side by Sondheim" continue through Sunday, May 13, on the Oakland University campus near Rochester. For ticket information, call the box office at 577-3300.

Even a less than perfect production of "Side by Side by Sondheim" can be enjoyed. And Meadow Brook's presentation of this revue is a little less than perfect.

An evening of Sondheim songs from hit musicals like "Company" or "Follies" is a genuine pleasure if only because it reminds one of Stephen Sondheim's prolific talent and intelligence.

Sondheim songs are acutely perceptive and beautiful expressions of modern-day sentiments. Oft-repeated themes are the trials of the marriage "predicament" or the poignantly exciting existence of life in New York. Listeners are affected by haunting melodies and insightful lyrics that elicit empathy.

At Meadow Brook, Carl Shurr directs a cast of four. One serves as narrator and three perform in the musical company. The presentation is professional, the set is simple and functional, costumes are elegant and staging is wonderful.



Debi Barsamian

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SCURR'S INTENT is good. He understands that personable performances are the essential component of this production, but here lies the major flaw. Performances are simply not consistent throughout. Some numbers just shine while others are tarnished disappointments.

An example of this contrast might be made of two of Connie Carmody's numbers. Her voice is really the best of the trio performing, and it is highlighted beautifully in the first act when she sings "Broadway Baby" from "Follies." Her performance is enchanting. The look of hope and aspiration on her face is touching.

But in the second act her rendition of "Losing My Mind" is a major disappointment. It is a painful, moving ballad that should be a show-stopper. It isn't.

Gail Oscar, for the most part, performs with zest. She is a joy, and she is tops in those numbers where she can draw on her comedic talent. Gail is delightful in "Getting Married Today" from "Company" and "You Gotta Get a Gimmick" from "Gypsy."

Oscar also interacts well with Robert Spencer. They portray a married couple and sing "We're Gonna Be All Right" from "Do I Hear a Waltz?" This number is one of the best.

AND ROBERT SPENCER is consistently good, if not always sparkling. But Spencer can be credited with singing proba-

ly the best number in the revue. His interpretation of "Anyone Can Whistle" from the musical of the same name is beautiful.

Really, the very best performance is given by Jeanne Arnold. She functions as narrator and gives the audience interesting background information. Arnold is genuinely likeable. She is gracious, warm, humorous and a "real pleasure throughout the production.

Terence Sherman is musical director and also serves as pianist with Jolie Kutoch. Both are always center stage and although silent in word pro-

vide all that is needed in musical accompaniment. This production has its ups and downs. Simply because the performers do.

Still, the numbers they do well are really great. And the numbers that don't fly... well, you'll still be half satisfied. After all, it's Sondheim.



Robert Spencer and Conni Carmody are two of the four actors in "Side by Side by Sondheim" at Meadow Brook Theatre.

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