



'Company' star is strong in role

Performances of the musical "Company" continue through Sunday, March 19, at the Birmingham Theatre. For ticket information, call the box office at 644-3533.

By Barbara Michals
special writer

Stephen Sondheim's "Company," currently revived at the Birmingham Theatre, takes a fascinating, penetrating look at marriage. The production features a few outstanding performances among a competent but generally lackluster cast. The show's strength lies almost solely in Sondheim's musical vision, which audiences tend to love or hate. Classic Sondheim is more the traditional American musical — no happy endings or catchy, hummable tunes. The lyrics and the music are "difficult," requiring a great deal

from both the performers and the audience to plumb their psychological depth. Sondheim's shows are inevitably described as caustic and cynical, and much of the 1970 "Company" is no exception.

Nevertheless, "Company" offers an underlying acceptance of the modern urban world it criticizes. Marriage may be a very imperfect state, but it still is presented as preferable to any alternative. "We all need somebody, not some body" — one of the characters emphatically asserts, despite her own reluctance to commit to marriage.

"Company" views marriage through the eyes of Bobby (Davis Gaines), a 35-year-old bachelor, and the five married couples who adore his company, fuss over him endlessly and try to get him married. In each of the marriages, a fun-loving pose hides underlying frustrations and disappointments. The song "Sorry-Grateful" expresses the mixed sig-



Davis Gaines (fifth from left) is Bobby, a bachelor whose married friends help him celebrate his birthday, in the Birmingham Theatre production of "Company."

nals Bobby receives from his married friends.

GAINES is wonderfully believable as Bobby. He is a handsome, poised actor with a powerful voice and winning smile. If that grin seems at times too fixed, it is an appropriate cover for Bobby's perplexity as he tries to digest his new insights into his friends' relationships. Among those friends, Alison Bevan is marvelously bitchy as the ul-

tra-cynical Joanne, now on her third marriage. Her sarcasm bristles in "The Little Things You Do Together" and her boozey rendition of "The Ladies Who Lunch."

Donna Lee Marshall is excellent as Amy, the bride-to-be who gets cold feet at the last minute. Her "Getting Married Today" is a very funny patter song which she delivers at break-neck speed, accompanied by very expressive facial grimaces. Anne Connors as April, the stereo-

typical dumb stewardess, and Carolee Carmello as Maria, a tough, streetwise New Yorker, both make their characters very credible but never remotely likeable.

The rest of the cast delineates their characters just barely or not at all. Under musical director Johnny Bowden, the ensemble numbers sound fine, and James Noone's simple set is cleverly versatile.

FOR YUPPIES, the women's costumes tend toward tacky with the

exception of the stewardess' uniform and one '70s peasant look that at least makes a definite statement. Director George Rondo has not achieved a perfect "Company," but Sondheim's insightful, thought-provoking lyrics and forceful music are very much worth the listening.

Barbara Michals teaches high school English in Southfield. A theater critic for the last 14 years, she is an inveterate playgoer who regularly catches up on all the New York productions.

Table talk

Soup winners

The three winning soups in a contest called the "Great Detroit-Area Soup-Off" are being featured during February at Wellington's in the Embassy Suites Hotel-Detroit/Southfield. The restaurant, which sponsors the annual contest, served the third place winner, Red River Scotch Broth (from Jill Burns of Ferndale), through Saturday. Second place winner, Chicken and Silders Soup (from Johnny Kolakowski of Wyandotte), is being served through Saturday, Feb. 25, and first place winner, Peanut Soup (from Sheila Ingersoll of Eastland), Monday-Saturday, Feb. 27 to March 4. Wellington's is open for lunch, offering a special buffet, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and for dinner from 5-10 p.m.

Chocolate party

Trappers Alley in Detroit's Greektown will host its third annual Chocolate Jubilee from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday-Friday, Feb. 23-24. Free samples of chocolate treats will be available from Trappers Alley merchants. "Downtown Desserts II" from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 23, will have Detroit chefs preparing their favorite chocolate desserts on the fourth level.

Armenian food

A "Gastronomical Journey through Historic Armenia" will be presented at 7 p.m. Saturday, March 4, at St. John's Armenian Church

Cultural Hall in Southfield. Food specialties of various regions of Historic Armenia will be featured, along with a mock traditional Armenian Village wedding, and vocal renditions by mezzo-soprano Mero Partamian of New York City. The evening is offered by the Preservation of Armenian Heritage Committee of the Alex Manogian School as a fund-raiser for the school's 20th anniversary. Tickets are \$40 per person. For more information call 569-2988.

Michigan Feast

Cranbrook P.M. "Adventures in Good Taste" will pay a return visit to the Appetenser restaurant in Birmingham for a Michigan Feast pre-

pared by Chef Christopher Angelosante and his staff. All Michigan products will be highlighted. Michigan wines will be served with each course at dinner. Admission is \$40 per person. For reservations call 645-3635.

Japanese dishes

A gourmet Japanese feast will be served from 6-10 p.m. Saturday, March 11, at the Musashi Japanese restaurant at Town Center in Southfield. The event includes a selection of fine wine by Decanter Imports and Don Lee Distributors. There will be live entertainment. Cost is \$50 per person. Reservations are required by Friday, March 3; phone 358-1911.



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