

Sondheim: smart and sassy, full of fun

Cotuit's *Side by Side* does him justice

By John Watters
arts@barnstablepatriot.com

February is the month of roses and chocolates, passion and sweetness, and in keeping with those themes the Cotuit Center for the Arts is serving up a perfect portion of each in their marvelous musical revue *Side by Side by Sondheim*.

Stephen Sondheim is hands down the most prolific American lyricist and composer of the latter 20th century. His body of work includes some of musical theater's greatest shows: *West Side Story*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Company*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods* and *Sunday in the Park with George*. His work and influence are seen in dozens of other stage shows, film and even television productions.

Accolades include a Pulitzer Prize, an Academy Award, eight Grammy Awards, and eight Tony Awards. His songs, known for their complexity, are the favorites of renowned performers such as Bernadette Peters, Angela Lansbury, Barbara Streisand, Elaine Stritch, Mandy Patinkin, Nathan Lane, and countless others.

Like his predecessors Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein, and Cole Porter, Sondheim's style and talent is indelible when it comes to filling the musical staffs of the American Songbook.

Mark LiCalsi directs this delightful evening of Sondheim samplings that amply entertains the audience.

Laura Garner, Lilly Mae Harrington and Martha Paquin, Kevin Quill and Glenn Wall are superbly backed on piano by Elizabeth Beckel and Nancy Wendlandt. Solo, duet or ensemble, the performers bring their own personality and prowess to the pieces, a staggering 29 songs that leave the audience calling for more.

In a show with many high points, some of the pinnacles are Garner's renditions of "Send in the Clowns" (*A Little Night Music*), "I Never Do Anything Twice" (*The Seven-Percent Solution*) and "I'm Still Here" (*Follies*).

Paquin shows her comedic side as she tackles the tongue-twisting lyrics in "The Boy From..." (a parody of "The Girl from Ipanema" from a little-known musical about *Mad* magazine), as well as the cold-footed bride-to-be in "Getting Married Today" (*Company*).

With a boombox voice, Harrington is a musical force. She lends her superb soprano style



DANIEL FONTNEAU PHOTO

IN COMES COMPANY – Performing in a revue of Stephen Sondheim's music at Cotuit Center for the Arts are, first row left to right, Lily Mae Harrington, Todd Bidwell, and Glenn Wall; back, Martha Paquin, Laura Garner, and Kevin Quill.

to "Marry Me A Little" (*Company*) and "I Have a Love" (*West Side Story*).

The trio of ladies steals the spotlight with their rendition of "You've Gotta Have a Gimmick" (*Gypsy*) as they show what it takes to get ahead in the world of burlesque. With a trumpet, a feather boa, and a pair of flashlights, the trio brings down the house.

Sondheim always seems to write his best stuff for women, but Wall and Quill get their moments to shine as well: Quill with "Being Alive" (*Company*) and the title song from *Anyone Can Whistle* and Wall with "You Must Meet My Wife" (*A Little Night Music*) and "I Remember" (*Evening Primrose*).

Todd Bidwell narrates the evening nicely as he stitches

the songs and themes together for the audience.

Side by Side will surely give you an evening of musical entertainment you will remember for a long time to come.

***Side by Side by Sondheim* is at Cotuit Center for the Arts Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. through Feb. 20. For tickets (\$20; \$18 seniors, \$15 members, \$10 students), call 508-428-0669**