

BROS Theatre Company

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC • OCTOBER 1994 • PARKSHOT STUDIO

REVIEW • RICHMOND & TWICKENHAM TIMES

An intoxicating Brew

For the first ten minutes of Barnes & Richmond Operatic Society's A Little Night Music at Parkshot Studio last week, I was afraid it wasn't going to work 'in the round'. It wasn't till later that I learned the reason for the uncertain opening was a backstage trauma.

But I needn't have worried. Like a good vintage wine, John Hebden's elegant production just got better and better. Sondheim's heady brew of bitter-sweet music and lyrics written in 1974, still proved intoxicating twenty years on.

With overtones of La Ronde, as husbands, wives, mistresses and lovers interchange relationships as past and present collide, the show is more reminiscent of an operetta in waltz time than a musical, an effect heightened by a wry musical commentary on the action by the inspired 'Liebeslieder' quintet In The Glamorous Life, Remember? and The Sun Won't Set.

Set in Sweden at the turn of the century, the drama's catalyst is Desiree Annfeldt, beautiful leading actress of her day. Angela Sturgeon plays this desirable lady with wit and composure, and gives the best known song in the show, Send in the Clowns, a distinctively astringent note.

But her mother, courtesan extraordinaire Mme Armfeldt has the cutting edge and Cynthia Carss was wonderful as this regally cynical old lady, whether delivering her devastating, razor sharp observations, or musically reminiscing in Liaisons about her many, and always superior, conquests.

Considered by many to be the best Broadway lyricist, past and present, most of the criticism levelled is at Sondheim as composer. His music is said to be unhumable. This I find incomprehensible. His melodies haunt me.

One thing most people are agreed on is that his lyrics spring from his individual characters. So the philandering Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm, Desiree's lover, sings In Praise of Women and is given an impeccably timed, perfect chocolate soldier, almost balletic performance by Paul St James.

Among the many good performances, Rachel Acus as a marvellously earthy, Petra the maid, gave a barnstorming, bawdy rendering of I Shall Marry the Miller's Son and Peter Woods was distinguished and dignified as Desiree's amour, Fredrik Egerman while James Meehan as his son Henrik gave a convincing portrayal of youthful angst.

Marie Creed as Fredrik's child-wife and Maggie Dawson as Charlotte were also excellent.

By this time you will have gathered I'm a fan. For me the vintage wine metaphor is apt. I do get drunk on Sondheim.

Jenny Scott

