Cabrillo offers a sweet offering of 'Charity'

By KATIE HUGHES MCKEE
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As I waited for the lights to go down at Cabrillo's Crocker Theater and the production of "Sweet Charity" to begin, I began to reminisce about productions at the old Cabrillo Theater. Moving one of Skip Epperson's huge sets, a centimeter at a time, trying unsuccessfully to be soundless behind the curtain as King Arthur gave his impassioned soliloquy. Swearing with long-time Cabrillo Stage stage manager Donna Gorman that if either of us ever won the lottery, we would buy pneumatic casters for the theater. Waiting until intermission or the end of the show to be able to flush either of the backstage toilets, as they could be heard in the audience. Sometimes there were bonus opportunities, like the "Flush the Toilet Waltz" in "My Fair Lady." My husband, the Sound Designer, waxing profane over the fact that the orchestra was seated in the audience.

Those days are gone. We have a state-of-the-art theater in this community, with flies, trapdoors, and an orchestra pit, and "Sweet Charity" makes full use of all the above. As we have all come to expect from the people at Cabrillo, the production values are impeccable, from Mr. Epperson's 1960s sets, which evoke "Laugh In" and Peter Sellers movies, to Maria Crush's June Cleaver dresses and hairstyles, and Skip Epperson and Kristi Zufall's pointillist use of rear projection.

Director Kathryn Adkins takes a cast of mainly students through the wonderful story of Charity Hope Valentine, the "night club hostess" with a heart of gold, which she keeps wearing on her sleeve and getting broken.

Choreographer Deanna Ross is faithful to the Fosse moves, which the cast of triple threats pulls off admirably. They can act, dance and sing, led by musical director and conductor Don Adkins.

I have never seen this show done by a community theater troupe, and now I know why it is so rarely done. A director won't even consider doing "Sweet Charity" unless he or she has someone in place for the lead. I can't think of another musical in which the leading lady has to carry as much as this one. Not even Mame Dennis is on stage as much as Charity.

Kristin Brownstone has all the chops, and in spades. Singer, actor, dancer and beauty, she is vulnerable, appealing and gullible: she is Charity Hope Valentine.

Other outstanding cast members are last summer's Sally Bowles, Brie Michaud, as Nickie, Lizzie Shipton as Helene and Caley Chase as Rosie. David Jackson and Cristina Cree make an excellent self-absorbed Vittorio Vidal and spoiled Ursula, and Joel P. Rogers, an Equity ringer, is a fabulous Daddy Brubeck.
Don't miss this production: schedule it now before the holidays get so hectic. It's already started: Halloween is behind us and before you know it, it will be Super Bowl. Each production benefits a different nonprofit: you can look online or call the box office for info. This way you truly will be giving to Sweet Charity.

IF YOU GO
"SWEET CHARITY"
Presented by: Cabrillo College Theatre Arts
WHEN: Fridays and Saturdays, 8 p.m. Sundays, 2 p.m. through Nov. 21, Bonus matinee, Saturday, Nov. 20, 3 p.m.
WHERE: Cabrillo Crocker Theater, 6500 Soquel Drive, Aptos
COST: General $20, Student/Senior $16, Children under 10 or Activity Card $13
DETAILS: www.ticketguys.com or 479-6331

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