

Love is thrilling, heartbreaking in 'Last Five Years'

By **KATIE HUGHES MCKEE**

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Last Friday night, I fell in love with a perfect stranger. His name is Jason Robert Brown, and he is the author and composer of "The Last 5 Years," currently in production at Cabrillo Stage. I was stunned when the evening was over: this man is the successor to Stephen Sondheim. Like Sondheim, Brown supports text with music. His music is similarly plot- and character-driven. And Brown does the master one better on his haunting Jonathan Tunick-like orchestrations: they are his own.

"The Last 5 Years" is the story of a relationship, which becomes a marriage, then crumbles. The two-person play, or "theatrical song cycle," as Brown dubs it, moves both forward and backward in time. It begins at the end of the relationship for Cathy, an aspiring actress, and the beginning for Jamie, a writer on the brink of fame. Cathy moves from crushed: "Still Hurting," "See, I'm Still Smiling," to elated and hopeful: "Goodbye Until Tomorrow," "I Can Do Better Than That." Jamie evolves from grateful and nearly overwhelmed by the success and happiness in his young life: "Shiksa Goddess," "Moving Too Fast," to sadder, wiser and compassionate: "Nobody Needs to Know," "I Could Never Rescue You." Ultimately, the songs ask: Where is the line between unconditional love and co-dependency? How much have I realized – and how much have I rationalized?

The couple is played by Cabrillo Stage veterans Ariel Buck and Andrew Ceglio, a real-life couple who met during 2007's "Little Shop of Horrors," and have been together the last four years. This extremely talented duo delivers the goods, dramatically and vocally. This is a small theater, and nuance is noticed, but they fill the space with Buck's voluptuous voice and Ceglio's comedic gifts.

Artistic director Jon Nor-

IF YOU GO

'THE LAST FIVE YEARS'

WRITTEN BY: Jason Robert Brown

PRESENTED BY: Cabrillo Stage

WHEN: Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sundays at 3 p.m., through Aug. 14

WHERE: Black Box Theater at the Crocker Theater on the campus of Cabrillo College, Aptos

TICKETS: Adult: \$16 to \$38. Senior (60+): \$16 to \$36. Children (6-12): \$16 to \$32

DETAILS: 479-6154 or www.cabrillostage.com

NOTE: There will be another production in the same building. Allow plenty of time to park

dgren has made some interesting choices for Cabrillo Stage's 30th year. He has brought back Lile Cruse, the man who created CS, to be musical director of "Hairspray," next in rep, and veteran Janie Scott to direct and choreograph. But he has chosen three shows that are less than 10 years old, and a director completely new to Cabrillo Stage, Mollye Maxner. Her choices of simple cubes for sets, minimal lighting and quiet costuming allow the audience to focus on the words, the music, and the emotions they evoke. The show's musical director, Mickey McGushin, was appreciative of her sensitivity in this area, and of the fact that she and Nordgren ultimately made the decision not to have an intermission in order to keep the artistic integrity of the work. Support this decision! Come early and buy concessions – and use the restroom!

McGushin told me that Brown's is the music young people now bring in for auditions, as Sondheim's was in our day. At 81, Sondheim to me is like an old cat: I know he won't be around much longer, and I know how sad I will be when he's gone. Good to know his successor is already here.