New musical, "Lunch," launches at Cabrillo Stage

You can't get much further off-Broadway than Cabrillo Stage, at least geographically. Yet CS may be instrumental in launching a new musical on the road with its spirited production of "Lunch." Instead of its usual year-end holiday production, CS opted this season for a new year's show, a modern urban fable about life, love, answered prayers, and second chances—a subject the authors know something about.

With a book by Emmy-winning TV writer Rick Hawkins, and songs by award-winning composer Steve Dorff and lyricist John Baitz, "Lunch" was first produced in 1994, when it went on a five-city national tour. Its collaborators moved on to other things until a series of serendipitous events—including a request from CS Artistic Director Jen Nordgren—led them all to reconvene in 2013 to revitate the show. This CS production of "Lunch" has a rewritten and updated book, 10 new songs, and a hard-working cast directed with verve and chutzpah by CS veteran Andrew Goege.

When conductor Nordgren raises his baton in the pit, we hear not the expected musical overture, but a montage of city sounds—footsteps, bits of conversation, traffic, a hot dog vendor, something broken. The curtain rises on a scrim of heavenly clouds and an omni gate which admits a confused Mackenzie Richards (the affable and reliable Max Bennett-Parker) into a recently created (via computer) version of New York City.

Mackenzie is a young couple (a love interest for Max) who has not given up on finding that love. He is a street performer who dreams of becoming a star, but in his spare moments, he sings in the streets, hoping to find his true love. Meanwhile, his friend Sophia (Ashley Rae Little), who is a big powerhouse singing voice, begins to look for a new life away from the city. She finds a job at a local restaurant and meets a man named John (John Baitz), who helps her to find her true love.

Mackenzie and Sophia's relationship grows stronger as they work together to achieve their dreams. But their paths are not without obstacles. Sophia's old flame, Nick (Nicholas Gerges), returns to town, threatening to take her away from Mackenzie. Meanwhile, Mackenzie's friend Max (Max Bennett-Parker) is determined to help him achieve his dream of becoming a star.

In the end, Mackenzie and Sophia are reunited and their dreams come true. Mackenzie is offered a chance to perform in a major production, and Sophia accepts a position as a featured singer in a local restaurant. As they prepare to leave, they realize that they have found true love and are ready to take on the world.