Cabrillo Stage ‘puts together’ Sondheim revue

By Joanne Englehardt

There’s a well-known axiom in theater about Stephen Sondheim: You either love him or hate him. That’s because his music and lyrics are unlike any other. They’re complex, sophisticated and sometimes dissonant (a combination of notes that may sound abrasive) to boot.

That makes them tremendously, maddeningly difficult to sing.

Fortunately for local Sondheim fans, for Cabrillo Stage’s short run of “Putting It Together,” director/musical director Michael J. McGushin rounded up some remarkable musical performers for this rather awkward, not-always-comfortable revue with songs from many of Sondheim’s theatrical creations: “Sunday in the Park with George,” “A Little Night Music,” “Company,” “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,” “Into the Woods,” and even the film “Dick Tracy,” for which he wrote several songs.

It certainly isn’t everyone’s cup of tea because Sondheim is an acquired taste. But with veterans like the luminous Kathryn Adkins and the commanding Curt Denham in the mix of five singers, it’s worth acquiring. The twosome offers up some of the best songs: “Country House,” plus Denham’s “Sorry-Grateful” and Adkins’ breathless “(Not) Getting Married Today” and sardonic “Could I Leave You?”

The revue’s three other singers try to keep up with these two with varying degrees of success. Melissa Reinertson mugs and jiggles a lot, but when she gets down to singing (“Lovely,” “The Miller’s Song”), she’s got a strong set of pipes.

Both young men (Joe Conceison and Blake Coelho) have their moments as well, with Conceison — looking like a gangly boy in his dad’s tuxedo — standing tall in “I Could Drive a Person Crazy” and his opening “Invocation and Instructions” to the audience.

Coelho’s voice doesn’t carry as well, so sometimes his lower notes are lost in otherwise decent offerings like “Now” and “Live Alone and Like It.” But when he teams up with Reinertson on “Bang” or with Denham and Coelho singing the naughty “Everybody Ought to Have a Maid,” he holds his own nicely.

In fact, some of the best songs are those sung by the entire “company” of five. They combined for “Back in Business,” “Being Alive,” the “Sooner or Later Sequence,” and, of course, “Putting It Together.”

The singing quintet is backed by an astounding...