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GCT 'Company' not for the kids

By Nancy McCarthy

GILROY — Dinner and sophisticated drama will be rolled into one potentially controversial package next weekend when Gilroy Community Theater stages the musical comedy *Company* following a catered dinner at Le Grande Etage on Monterey Street near Lewis.

The show will go Nov. 1, 2 and 3. Tickets cost \$17.50, but a starting time has not yet been set.

Winner of the New York Drama Critic's Best Musical Award of 1970 and the 1971 plus a Tony award, *Company* is a musical comedy set in an apartment house. Richard Nelson is musical director.

Director George Costa, who describes the cast of *Company* as "excellent" said the show has a lot of simultaneous action in the five-balcony apartment set. Marital problems of neighbors, as well as the anti-hero's encounters with three potential marriage candidates, may be a little sophisticated for local audiences, he said.

"I'm curious to see what the reaction might be. It's adult and contemporary, not a show you'd want to bring the kids to. Some people might find it controversial because it also deals with sex and drugs. I think they'll love it, myself."

Steve Schneickert stars as Robert, a bachelor who is afraid of not getting married, yet is gun-shy after sizing up imperfections in marriages of his friends.



Photo special to Weekend

Cast members line up for Gilroy Community Theatre's musical comedy 'Company.'

Susie Chastand, K.T. Peterson and Kathi Sullivan play his girlfriends. His married friends include: Sarah Taylor and Rob Strong as Sarah and Harry; Judy Langley and Mark Ashford as Susan and Peter; Ruth E. Mullins and Michael O'Connor as Jenny and David; Betsy Andrade and Jim Calbreath as Amy and Paul; and June Compton and Tom Hepner as Joanne and Larry.

The vocal backup group, Vocal Majority, is composed of Carol Harris, Chris Souza, Dan Walters, Trishia Murphy, Dave Wiggins, Linda Gray and Bill Pierce.

Songs from the hit show include: *Little Things*, *Another Hundred People*, *Side by Side* and *The Ladies Who Lunch*.

The catered dinner will include glazed chicken, baked potato, vegetable, roll, coffee and pumpkin pie. A no-host bar will be available during the dinner and the show.

A cash deposit or credit card number must be given with reservations, Costa said.

For information and reservations call 842-SHOW.

GCT opens *Company* with veteran local cast

By Steve Schumann
Miracle Miles Staff

Director George Costa has assembled a veteran cast for his 12th Gilroy Community Theatre (GCT) show, *Company*, and has found that the cast is able to handle a lot of the material, including the tough musical score.

The dinner show opens Thursday at the Grand Etage Ballroom in Gilroy.

Costa has had previous working experience with all but three members of the cast of 14.

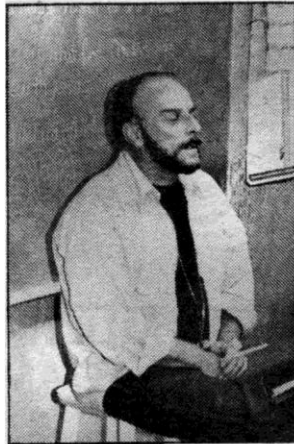
"*Company* is very contemporary," Costa said, "and because it was written in the '70s, it's very unusual, and different."

GCT chose the play to balance *South Pacific*, last summer's musical. "We try to get a little variety," Costa said. "This play provides a contrast to *South Pacific*, which was very traditional, old-fashioned."

For the cast, Costa sees it as fun for them, despite the difficulties in the book, because it is so modern and easy to relate to.

Company follows a year in the life of Robert, a 35-year-old bachelor who, as he runs into encounters with women and married friends, can't make up his mind about marriage. His encounters with three women, the stewardess, the fiancée, and the "peculiar" one, give him the opportunity to judge the imperfections of his friends' marriages in a new light.

"I think the audience will find it very entertaining," said Costa. "It's very controversial, and designed for the sophisticated audience."



GEORGE COSTA

"Gilroy's ready for it. I hate it when people say: 'Do you think Gilroy's ready for it?' or 'Will the farmer catch on?'"

In the leading role, longtime actor Steve Schneickert was cast. He has worked with Costa since he was a teenager, and his first Gilroy exposure was in the Costa-directed *Hello Dolly!*

"Steve's probably one of the few people around here who's a professional," Costa said. "He makes all the rehearsals, knows his lines, knows what he's doing, does his work, is proficient, competent, all those good things."

Another longtime associate of Costa's is choreographer K.T. Peterson. She has also worked with him since she was a teenager. Costa said she retired from the stage for six years before he called her to work with him in 1982's *The Roar of the Greasepaint*. In *Company*, besides choreography, she'll play one of the bachelor's three girlfriends.

"She has patience," said Costa. "She's very good with the non-dancers."

Betsy Andrade and Ruth E. Mullins are also working in *Company*. Both actresses have shared similar GCT experiences with Costa, recent dinner shows *Side by Side with Sondheim* and *Rogers a la Carte*. Andrade first worked with Costa eight years ago, in *Blythe Spirit*, an early GCT show.

"She seems like an oldtimer," Costa said of Andrade. "Betsy's a hard worker, she's a lot of fun, and very dedicated. She's a good character actress."

"Ruth E. is very versatile: versatile more than anything," said Costa of the lead actress in *South Pacific*. "She's got her act together, learns the material, does her job."

The cast also includes local theater veterans:

■ Jim Calbreath — "Jim worked in *Greasepaint* for me, and again in *South Pacific*. He's coming along, it's been very difficult for him. In casting him as leads, it was like starting at the top, and that's rough"

■ Mark Ashford — "He's been a musician in most of my shows in Gilroy. He got a taste for acting, so he auditioned for this show?"

■ Michael O'Connor — "He was in *South Pacific*, and worked with me in *Surfer Boy* in San Jose."

Other *South Pacific* veterans in *Company* include Tom Hepner, Sarah Taylor, Susie Chastang, and Judy Langley.

Newcomers to the GCT — George Costa experience are Rob Strong, Kathi Sullivan, and June Compton.

Company was written by Sondheim, and won the New York Drama Critic's and a Tony award for Best Musical, in the early '70s.

GCT will present the play as a dinner show at the Grand Etage Ballroom, at Monterey and Lewis streets in Gilroy, on November 1, 2, and 3.

Showtime is 8 p.m. Tickets, reserved in advance, are \$17.50 each, and can be obtained at the Theatre Angels box office on Fifth Street. Reservations can be made by calling 842-7469 or 848-3344.

Boring 'Company' kept at GCT's cramped stage

By Joanne Rife

I missed the first third of the first act of Gilroy Community Theatre's *Company* because my seat was sort of inside the piano.

I moved when I decided the actors were singing, not mouthing words whenever the piano was played. I stood for the next third of the act in a doorway until my feet hurt. For the final third I found a seat but I could only see the right half of the stage and the top half of the performers.

If you think this colors my enjoyment of the Sondheim musical, you're right.

GCT has been struggling with inadequate quarters for its annual dinner theatre production. The Grand Etage Ballroom is no exception.

The set-up in the room is *wrong wrong wrong*. I spent most of my time thinking how it could have been done better: move the tables out, seat only half the number crowded on opening night, move the orchestra, open out the wings on stage, put the action up off floor level.

In other words, do something.

There are good seats in the cramped quarters. If you have tickets for this coming weekend's productions make sure they are not at tables A and G, or even B and F; and make sure you're in the front two or three rows. Otherwise *Company* is going to be a struggle to watch.

It is not fair to GCT's loyal patrons to make them spend an evening grappling with such basics as a theatre seat next to the drummer and a view of half the stage and top halves of the performers.

As for production itself, *Company* is a musical comedy love story without a girl; an introspective look at marriage amongst the angst people. The story, such as it is, is singleness grown stale and marriage grown soggy, with the final judgment being soggy is better than staleness, because in marriage, at least one has *Company* in one's loneliness.

Doesn't sound very uplifting does it?

Well, it's not, but it is dashedly clever, dreadfully sophisticated, and realllly my deah, veddy Newww Yawk. All of which, as a resident of South County, I raaaather like.

It is also a good bit of a challenge to GCT's company.

Sheer energy is not going to get the players out of this jam. Nuance is the name of the game and nuance is not one of GCT's fortes. I came away having missed the point — for a theater critic this is not good. I rushed out to read the play and got the point. Maybe the point was made on the side of the stage I couldn't see.

Well, I like Stephen Sondheim and I particularly like his lyrics. They are everything to the play.

They carry the plot, reveal the motivations, make the jokes, deal with the ironies. Therefore, enunciation during the songs is far and away the most important aspect of singing.

Until I escaped proximity to the orchestra I was unable to follow the story, define the characters or figure out what was happening. The dialogue, that curious, flat, brittle repartee of sophisticated men and women at cocktail parties, left me in confusion.

I left not giving a fig for any of the characters. They were neither bad nor good; the crises were piddling. It was, indeed, a good deal like a cocktail party where the conversation blows back and forth signifying nothing, but entertaining nonetheless.

Three performances stand out: Steve Schneickert as the lead (Robert) sings well, emotes flatly (which is how he is supposed to emote) and holds things together. He also is boring. It is difficult to see what a charmer he is supposed to be, but then, we are talking about New York, where everything is supposed to be a bore.

June Compton as Joanne is mesmerizing. A total jerk of a woman, I couldn't stand the character, but at least I felt something. She has two good songs — *The Little Things You Do Together* and the marvelous *Ladies Who Lunch*:

Here's to the girls who play wife —

Aren't they too much?

Keeping house but clutching a copy of Life

Just to keep in touch.

And this.

So here's to the girls on the go —

Everybody tries.

Look into their eyes and you'll see what they know:

Everybody dies.

And then there is the gem of a part done by Kathi Sullivan as April. Maybe it's easy to play airheads, but I liked her immensely, and she has a Sondheim classic she sings with Schneickert.

For the most part I was disappointed in the rest, although Susie Chastang was very good with *Another Hundred People* and in the second act the choral work picked up measurably.

Company opened on Broadway in 1970 and received the New York Drama Critics' Circle and Outer Circle awards for best musical. The book is by George Furth. Interestingly, Dean Jones played the lead and Elaine Stritch played Joanne.

The GCT production, planned just for last weekend, was continued through tonight and Saturday night when pre-sales sold out for both Friday and Saturday.

Let's hope the company has figured out what to do with their patrons by now.