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BWW Review: A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC at ARTS Theatre

by Barry Lenny Apr. 28, 2018



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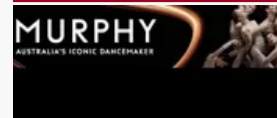
Reviewed by Barry Lenny, Thursday 26th April 2018.

Set at the end of the 19th Century in Sweden on midsummer night, the shortest night of the year, **Stephen Sondheim's, A Little Night Music**, is a romantic roundabout, with three generations of Armfeldt women at its centre. The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of South Australia has enlisted Pam O'Grady as the

director, with Richard Trevaskis as assistant director, and Christine Hodgen as musical director, to produce this very difficult work. The music and lyrics are by Sondheim, to a book by **Hugh Wheeler**, inspired by **Ingmar Bergman's** 1955 film, Smiles of a Summer Night.

The musical opens with the Overture and we are introduced to Mr. Lindquist, Mrs. Nordstrom, Mrs. Anderssen, Mr. Erlanson, and Mrs. Segstrom, sung respectively by Macintyre Howie Reeves, Monique Watson, **Vanessa Lee Shirley**, **James Nicholson**, and Josine Talbot, who are referred to as 'The Quintet', and act as a Greek chorus, commenting on all that occurs. So often, sadly, this group is treated poorly, being seen as a minor, background part of the production. Not so in this production, where they are

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When all of the players have entered, waltzing with their current partners (most of the music is in 3/4 waltz time, or compound time, such as 12/8), and left again, Madame Armfeldt tells her teenaged granddaughter, Frederika Armfeldt, that the summer night "smiles" three times: firstly on the young, secondly on fools, and thirdly on the old.

Desiree Armfeldt spots a past lover, Fredrik Egerman, in the audience at the opening night of the latest play in which she is appearing. Her current, married, lover is Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm, but she has no qualms about trying to reignite the earlier affair. Fredrik, however, has married eighteen-year-old Anne, with whom his son, Henrik, is secretly in love. Almost a year into their marriage, Anne is still a virgin, and the frustrated Fredrik is not averse to an affair with Desiree. Equally frustrated, Henrik has been having an affair with a servant, Petra. The Count's wife, Countess Charlotte, is aware of his affairs, but turns a blind eye, as she still loves him.

It is arranged that they will all go to spend the weekend at Desiree's mother's country estate, with Madame Armfeldt reluctantly hosting the entourage. Desiree's daughter, Fredrika, whose father might possibly be Frederick, is also on hand, as are the gatecrashers, Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm and Countess Charlotte Malcolm.

The roles of Desiree Armfeldt and Fredrik Egerman are in the very experienced hands of **Bronwen James** and Robin Schmelzkopf, who have performed together numerous times over the years, and their creation of that easy familiarity necessary in the relationship of their characters is testimony to the rapport that they have onstage. They give us two wonderfully believable performances and so many touching moments of great intimacy. James, of course, gets to sing the best-known song from the musical, *Send in the Clowns*, and she does an exceptional job of it in a moving rendition.

The role of Madame Armfeldt is superbly portrayed by Norma Knight, who has taught more singers in South Australia than anybody would want to count. Her wonderfully understated performance is an object lesson for anybody aspiring to work in the theatre and her poignant song, *Liaisons*, is delivered with a nice touch of sadness in her nostalgic reminiscences.

Nicholas Bishop and Deborah Caddy play Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm and Countess Charlotte Malcolm, two more performers bringing experience and plenty of humour to their roles.

Megan Doherty, as Petra, fills her character with the joy of life, and ends with one of the best performances of *The Miller's Son* that you are likely to see.

Emerging young artist, Henny Walters, never fails to impress, and her utterly delightful

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Emilene Whitehead presents us with a vacuous and self-centered **Anne Egerman** and, as Henrik Egerman, Will Richards gives us a youth full of angst and naivety. When Anne and Henrik run off together one cannot help thinking that they deserve one another. Laurence Croft plays Madame's butler, Frid, stiff and proper when on duty, and lustful at other times. Renie Walker and Catherine Marlin complete the cast as Malla, Desiree's Maid, and Osa, Madame's maid at the villa.

Christine Hodgen's small onstage orchestra, consisting of strings, winds, harp, and piano, handle Sondheim's complexities with great skill. The set, lighting, and costuming all rate highly, too. Don't miss this one.

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Barry Lenny

Born in London, Barry was introduced to theatre as a small boy, through being taken to see traditional Christmas pantomimes, as well as discovering jazz ([read more...](#))

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