

LOVE, AMERICAN STYLE

Sondheim's *Company* camps out in the swingin' '70s at LCC

About halfway through the first act of Student Productions Association's staging of Stephen Sondheim's *Company* at LCC's Blue Door Theatre, I happened upon an idea so absurd it brought on a viciously improper fit of giggles: Imagine adapting one of John Cassavettes' movies — say, *Faces* or *A Woman Under the Influence* — for the stage, and then casting it with nothing but 8-year-old actors. It's a chilling proposition. Can't you just see some post-toddler in a bathrobe flailing around like Gena Rowlands, ranting and chain smoking and pulling out her hair, while some kid does his best Peter Falk, crunching on lines like "Mabel is not crazy; she's unusual" while chasing down his manic wife?

At once fascinating and dreary, SPA's *Company* is a strange take on a strange musical — one in which Sondheim, channeling Neil Simon and Elton John, delves into the swinging 1970s, with its bell-bottom jeans, EST-inspired narcissism and burgeoning rate of divorce, American style. The action, such as it is, revolves around Robert (well played by Trevor Eichhorn), a bachelor hounded by his married friends to give up the single life. As Bobby-Robbie-Bob struggles to find meaning in his several relationships, his friends chirp and plead with him like a kind of stoned Greek chorus, urging Robert to couple-up before it's too late.

Director and choreographer Michael Watkins, acknowledging that *Company* is indeed an "odd show," attempts to mine the "Me" decade for relevance to contemporary morals, but the production remains more anthropological than topical. Some of the actors, feeling

CRISTINA HERNANDEZ, SHANNON COLTRANE, LEELA GOUVEIA, RUTH AMES LANGSTRAAT, SUSAN SCHROEDER-WHITE AND TREVOR EICHHORN IN *COMPANY*



for groovy, look like fish out of water, though a large share of the blame for this can be chalked up to the exoticism of the material; this is not Sondheim's best work, and the dated feel of material is unaided by a non-plot (book by George Furth) that makes Fellini's *8 1/2* look al dente.

And still, there is much to admire in *Company*. The musical numbers are raw and often exhilarating, accompanied solely by a live piano played by Jim Greenwood (for best results, sit opposite the piano). And the show, in its very strangeness, does cast an odd kind of spell; after the languorous first act, Watkins makes sure things pick up in the second, squeezing whatever catharsis

he can find in a handful of expertly choreographed set pieces.

What really elevates this show, however, are the performances of Shannon AJ Coltrane and Cristina Hernandez. As the lanky, seemingly uptight Jenny, Coltrane is a study in restraint, and the scene where she smokes pot for the first time is a flawless riff on comic timing. Hernandez, for her part, plays nervous bride Amy; she delivers a stunning staccato solo, all breathless panic and neuroses, that damn near steals the show. ■

Company plays through Feb. 16 at LCC's Blue Door Theatre; \$10-\$13, call 463-5761.

DANCE BY ALEX NOTMAN

A TWIST ON WONDERLAND

The Work Dance Company creates a world of hip-hop wonder at the Hult Center

Forget rabbits with pocket watches. Forget tea parties. Forget *Alice in Wonderland*. Work Dance Company director and choreographer Nathan Boozer wants to take you down another rabbit hole into his *Wonderland*, an upcoming Feb. 15 show at the Hult Center that takes a look through the hip-hop looking glass at lands filled with music, butterflies, candy, zombies and Lady Gaga.

"It's not what you would think when you think of wonderland," says Boozer, who was busy painting a prop fence for the show when *EW* caught up with him. "It's about imagination. Letting yourself go to those places."

Some of those places are going to be whimsical and lovely, like the show-opener where Work Dance's 21 hip-hop and jazz funk dancers will be performing in front of a giant screen playing a video of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. And some of those places are going to be a little darker (but not too dark, it's a family-friendly show), like the *Zombieland* piece with dancers-turned-zombies complete with fake blood and clouds of dry ice set to Rob Zombie's "Dragula." Boozer, who used a similar piece at 2012's Dance for a Reason, says it's a real "audience pleaser." Then there's *Gagaland*, where the pop star's hits "Bad Romance," "Telephone" and "Born this Way" will set the tone as "Gaga-esque" dancers break it down in front of a backdrop of abstract art and glitter.

For the past 10 months, Boozer has been meticulously crafting everything from props and choreography to videos and music (working with his "right-hand man," producer Ryan King) because he doesn't want *Wonderland* to be a dance recital; he wants it to be a show. The audience is "going to feel like they went through a ton of different emotions," he says. Between the 11 choreographed Work Dance pieces, special guests from the local dance community will perform, including Kings Krew, Dance Northwest, Mission to Mars and the UO Jam Squad. For the first time, Boozer will also be taking the production to Portland, with two March performances of *Wonderland* at The Headwaters Theater. "I wanted to step outside the box and push my limits," Boozer says. "My dancers work really hard for what we do and I wanted more people to see it." ■

Wonderland shows for one-night only in Eugene at 7:30 pm Friday, Feb. 15, at the Hult Center; \$17.



THE WORK DANCE COMPANY PERFORMS "GAGALAND" FROM *WONDERLAND*.