

San Mateo County Journal

IF YOU GO:

By: Keith Kreitman

“Rough Crossing” by Tom Stoppard. Songs by Andre Previn, lyrics by Tom Stoppard.

PERFORMED BY: Dragon Productions Theatre Company. Directed by Dave Sikula.

WHERE: 535 Alma Street, Palo Alto

WHEN: 8PM Thurs. – Sat.; 2PM Sunday. Closes Aug. 3.

TICKETS: \$13 -- \$20.

CONTACT: 1-800-838-3006 or www.dragonproductions.net/tickets

Of one thing I am certain, English playwright Tom Stoppard, already honored by filmdom’s Academy Awards and Broadway’s Tony Awards, is one of the greatest playwrights of his generation, tackling some of the most seriously dramatic, intellectual and nonsensically comedic material with the same genius, flair and originality.

“Rough Crossing” at the Dragon Theatre in Palo Alto is a shipboard farce out of the 1930’s, based upon a work by the French dramatist Ferenc Molnar and makes one almost embarrassed to laugh so hard at such corny situations and dialogue that is slathered on in the extremis by an excellent cast. And, that’s what it’s all about, Stoppard’s love of the uses and meanings of language.

In the hands of the poorly equipped it could be painful but enjoyment increase in direct ratio with the quality of the performers. And, the secret of the success of this production at Dragon is director Dave Sikula rounded up a super cast, then stepped back and let ‘em rip.

Monica Cappuccini and Noel Wood are high on my list of the best and most versatile in the Bay area. Both are extraordinarily nuanced in their split second reactive movements and facial expressions. Cast together, the chemistry is explosively funny.

Here, they are Natasha and Ivor, two actors aboard the same ship heading from Southampton, England to New York City as the two playwrights for their new show Turai (Steve Cortopassi and Gal (Magenta Brooks), who are still on deadline to complete the musical before they land.

Also along is Adam (Jason Arias), the shows musical composer and director who is

in a romantic relationship with Natasha. Unfortunately, Adam has been suffering from a speech impediment that is causing him to respond at such a snails pace, that sometimes he is answering the first comment after the second had already been aired and being discussed.

Once aboard, Natasha and Ivor engage in a little sexual hanky-panky, which is overheard by the rest of the company. This devastates Adam and he goes into a suicide mode. In order to defuse this situation, Turai writes new material encompassing the overheard comments so that Adam will be convinced the presumed sexual tête-à-tête was only an overheard rehearsal of a scene from the play.

Cortopassi is very convincing as the growingly frustrated, albeit the only rational and intelligent mind in the company. Brooks doesn't get as much dialogue but is a convincing backup, involved in a running gag about her voracious appetite.

Another running gag is between Turai and Dvornichek (Jonathan Ferro) the neophyte cabin steward, who steals scenes right and left as he confuses names of the ship's parts, misunderstands comments by Turai that causes him to repeatedly drink down the cognac he had brought for him and breaks in with brilliant plot suggestion for the two playwrights.

The play is fraught with little idiocies, which might pass the audience's attention. The funniest is when the ship is yet anchored in the harbor Dvornicheck is unbalanced with the nonexistent role of the ship. But, when sailing, and the ship actually is rolling in a storm with the others being tossed about the cabin, he stands and walks solidly erect.

Another thing you may be sure of is if Ron Gasparinetti is the scenic designer, you will get a setting uniquely suitable for the period of any play. And, he hit the mark again with the nautical set for "Rough Crossing."