

Enjoying opening nights at theaters

A sold-out crowd of season ticket holders, sponsors and guests gave a standing ovation to the two stars of "Marry Me a Little" on June 7 at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts.

TheatreWorks Artistic Director Robert Kelley changed the locale of the play from New York to San Francisco and created a new scenario. Created by playwright Craig Lucas and director Norman Rene, the short play is built of Stephen Sondheim songs originally written for other plays.

A splendid set designed by Bruce McLeod, complete with a moon above the San Francisco skyline, is the perfect backdrop for this musical story.

It's a simple plot with much to say, about a pair of very attractive 20somethings who have no one special in their lives, or even plans on a Saturday night, revealing complexities of hopes and dreams.

A.J. Shively stars as Him and Sharon Rietkerk as Her. Music Director William Liberatore plays the entire score on piano in a corner of the set.

Rietkerk said that her character deciding to change her life in one night "is very insightful."

Rietkerk first encountered Sondheim 10 years ago with "Sweeney Todd."

"Now I am smarter, I hope, and can see different things," she said.

Shively is from New York; they met in a TheatreWorks New Works seminar several years ago. "The music is great; we're having a blast," he said.

This is TheatreWorks' 19th production of a Sondheim play.

Peggy and Yogen Dalal loved the San Francisco touches. "It's the perfect time for Sondheim to meet the Millennials," Yogen said at the post-performance party.

Seen congratulating the stars were executive producers Michelle and Michael Kwatinetz, producers Nancy Ginsburg Stern and Rick Stern, Dorothy Saxe, board chair Julie Kaufman, Mark Flegel, and Rietkerk's parents, Jim and Kathy Rietkerk, who drove from Uplands for the opening.

The production continues through June 29 at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts.

For ticket information, visit theatreworks.org or call 650-463-1960.

Previewing Pinter's 'Birthday Party'

Dragon Theatre's Second Stage in Redwood City presented an event to celebrate the opening of Harold Pinter's "The Birthday Party." More than 30 people attended the June 5 occasion that started with a pre-show panel featuring lecturers from the Stanford drama department, Rush Rehm and Kay Kostopoulos, followed by dinner by the bite at LV Mar and finally the three-act play.

Kostopoulos, a jazz vocalist and musician, said, "It's important to learn the rhythm of the dialogue as it is written. She also said that "Pinter's sparseness of language gives so much for the actors to work with."

Rehm said that his favorite thing about Pinter is how he writes, both the rhythm of the language and quality of his writing. He reminded everyone that "'The Birthday Party' put him on the map."

The locale is an English seaside inn, but it is far from a tranquil setting. Most likely, no one has ever attended a party exactly like it. Counting the guest of honor, there are five guests who all present questions and provide no answers.

English-born director Jenny Hollingsworth had never seen the play. She said, "There is a juxtaposition between humor and terror in 'The Birthday Party.'" She wanted to direct the play because of the opening scene, which is her favorite, and in her opinion is the funniest. She grew up with people like innkeepers Petey and Meg. "I can hear the voices in my head," she said.

Celia Maurice, who plays Meg, said that she did a Pinter play 40 years ago. Growing up in the English countryside, she also said she knew people like the innkeepers, and was pleased to have the opportunity to portray their naivete.

Brian Levi, who plays McCann, one of the menacing guests, said, "Pinter's complexity is left to the actor to come up with his own stories. We had no idea what we were doing. It was a fantastic collaboration between the actors and director."

Sharing the opportunity to meet the speakers and sample the Spanish menu at LV Mar were Mary Dowley, Jan Morate, Lessa Bouchard, Patricia Rohrs Maria Victoria Ferro, Martin Horowitz, Edson Kamin, Mary Moore and board members Jill O'Nan, Dale Albright, Gennady Farber and Barbara Schonborn.

The play continues through June15.

For ticket information, email tickes@dragonproductions.net.

Email Janet Duca Norton at society@dailynewsgroup.com.