Kresge hosts Broadway Company

America has found it easy enough to distinguish an upper class for whom social concerns are amusements: radical chic. It is only recently, though, that genial self-hatred ("God, am I corrupt? God, is my life empty and meaningless") has permeated the musical theater. Broadway, which used to feed America unclothed visions of love, has, in the meantime, gained the effortless cynicism that passes for sophistication today. The Church, whose religion has long ago assumed its role as the moral arm of religious thought has made its appearance on the musical stage, with the theology of J.C. Spenzer, and, more recently, with the self-mocking of Lennie Bernstein's "Marn," whose singers musically shout their shortcomings and despair to packed houses of the middle-class, de-sacralized middle class.

And finally the how-empty-my-life's confession that has become the new sophistication that feeds the musical comedy. Company, which first appeared over nearly two years, and won a Tony award for best musical, lives on self-doubt and earnest questioning of the middle-class values that underlie their affirmations. Consisting of a series of tableaux revolving around a set of married couples and their unmarried friend, the play begins by exposing, with the appropriate room left for doubt, irony, and such, the sanctity of monogamy (or at least one-on-one male female relationships) as the foundation of fulfilled existence. At the conclusion, Robert (the protagonist) has apparently woken up, and in an extension of the play's philosophy to life in general, declares that the real thing is to remain open and willing to be hurt. The play ends ambiguously, though, as Robert, seemingly Broadway's attempt at an existential hero, looks on from a distance as his friends wait for him at his apartment; it is, as it is at many times throughout the play, his birthday.

Along the way, the play finds time to be about obsolescence, and sex as well. Robert's three girlfriends are displayed, and required to bick in shrill harmony, in Act One. In the second act, Robert's story of a Miami connoisseur who requires that he leave the motel to procure champagne and baby oil gets a new conquest all hot and bothered. Robert's ensuing copulation is not seen (the bed merely rolls off the stage), but a dancer in leotards is; she shimmies about the set while the orchestra plays torted music and, on tape, Robert and his lovely express their innermost thoughts: "Oh, this is sensational!" "Oh, I think he really likes me!" "Oh, she has such a smooth body!" "I think I could love him!" "If only I could remember her name." This, then, for those who wonder, is what the upwardly mobile, guilt ridden think as they fuck.

Yet there is some pleasure in watching the production currently being mounted in Kresge Auditorium by the MIT Musical Theatre Guild. Two of the tableaux work with marvelous effect: Sarah (Valerie Norwood) and Isyly (Peter J. Fitt-Gerod) perform very well together to bring off a picture of an irrationally successful couple, the one a food freak, the other a latent alcoholic, and the audience responded warmly to their karate demonstration. And Amy (Sherry H. Arrell) performs winningly as a nervous heiress who has lived with her betrothed for years but can't go through with the pointless ceremony. Unfortunately somewhat wooden. Yet perhaps his characterization of a vaguely despondent bachelor entering a lonely middle age works anyway: his lines are not the brilliant witticisms one might think he would be, and the delivery manages to convey a grittiness. Josue de Guzman (in April) does a fine job with a role that requires her to portray a personable piece of beef.

The performance I saw felt much to be desired technically. A good part of the intrinsic pleasure of such a play (whose one set contains of a multi-leveled platform, each level of which represents a room in one couple's apartment) derives from the clockwork efficiency with which the sex change and characters move about the set. Unfortunately, the pacing of this performance seemed slowed by difficulty the actors had in moving about. Further, many of the action movements to their positions could be seen by the audience. The result was that much of the action seemed contorted. On a few occasions the people seemed to lie with the direction rather than the set. Kresge Auditorium's shortcomings somewhat dim his toista into song, a proof about the stage before beginning a number.

The lighting was sloppy. Literature is devoted of cues were missed during the evening. The bass in the orchestra were subdued, producing a better balance with the strings than usual, but a weak overall sound, which, however, allowed the singers to be generally audible. The sound of the strings was better than usual, for student productions here, but as usual could use help.

-Michael Feiring

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