

Kresge hosts Broadway Company

America has found it easy enough to develop 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 unclouded visions of love as the meaning of life, has of late gained the effortless cynicism that passes for sophistication. Thus, religious thought has made its appearance on the musical stage, with the theology of J.C. Superstar, and, more obviously, with the self-loathing of Lennie Bernstein's *Mass*, whose singers musically shout their shortcomings and despair to packed houses of the well-groomed, deodorized middle class.

And finally the how-empty-my-life-is confession that has become the new sophistication has affected the musical comedy. *Company*, which ran on Broadway for nearly two years, and won a Tony award for best musical, lives on self-doubt and earnest questioning of the middle-class values it ultimately more-or-less affirms. Consisting of a series of tableaux revolving around a set of married couples and their unmarried friend, the play begins by expressing, with the appropriate room left for doubt, irony, and such, the sanctity of marriage (or at least one-to-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 involves being 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 coy about obscenity, and sexist as well. Robert's three girlfriends are displayed, and required to bitch in shrewish harmony, in Act One. In the second act, Robert's story of a Miami conquest who requests 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 demurely rolls off the stage), but a dancer in leotards is; she shimmies about the set while the orchestra plays torrid 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"; It's poetry"; "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 Harry (Peter J. Fitzgerald) perform very well together to bring off a picture of an ironically 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. Arell) performs winningly as a nervous bride who has lived with her betrothed for years but can't go through with the pointless ceremony. Robert (Charles Kiefer) sings reasonably, but his acting style is unfortunately somewhat wooden. Yet perhaps his characterization of a vaguely despondant bachelor entering a lonely middle age works anyway; his lines are not the brilliant witticisms one might wish they would be, and the delivery manages to convey a gentle irony. Jossie de Guzman (as April) does a fine job with a

role that requires her to portray a personable piece of beef.

The performance I saw left much to be desired technically. A good part of the intrinsic pleasure of such a play (whose one set consists 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 scenes 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 actors movements to their positions could be seen by the audience. The result was that much of the action seemed contrived. On a

few occasions the problem seemed to lie with the direction rather than the set or Kresge Auditorium's shortcomings: persons pointlessly climb staircases to burst into song, or prwl about the stage before beginning a number.

The lighting was sloppy. Literally dozens of cues were missed during the evening.

The brass 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 Feirtag

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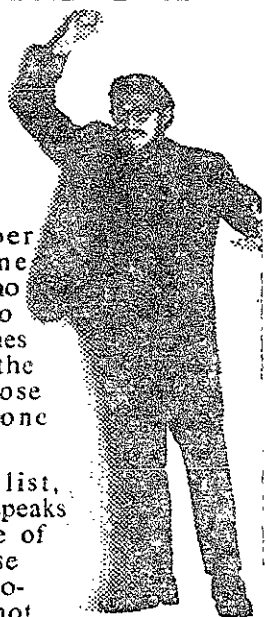
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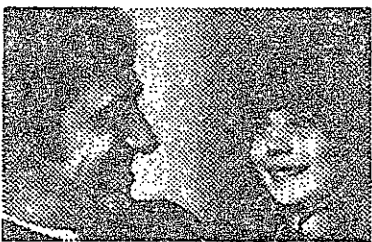
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