A look behind Life's pictures

By Kathy Hamblin

Editor's note: Associate Arts Editor Kathy Hamblin '78 lives in the Washington area and has filed this summer report.

At last, after many years of artistic decline, the American Musical Theatre finally has hope for survival. This revitalization of one of the country's most popular artforms is fostered by an innovative idea called the Musical Theatre Lab. The lab, currently situated at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., was created by the Stuart Ostrow Foundation to "help reinvigorate the American Musical Theatre." Included among the Foundation's Board of Directors are such musical theatre greats as Bob Fosse (director of Pippin) and Stephen Sondheim (creator of A Little Night Music).

The lab presents a series of "workshop" productions of new and original musicals, uncut in unabridged form and cast with professional actors. The physical production — lights, sets, costumes, props, and orchestration — is kept at a minimum; the Lab seeks to "create a flexible rehearsal atmosphere where playwrights, choreographers, and directors can experiment artistically." The performances of these musicals are free and open to the public. Audience response to each work gives a general indication of the musical's potential for success, and each piece can be sufficiently revised and rewritten before launching it into the real theatrical world.

Followers of current Broadway musicals notice that successful shows are few and far between. Over the years, there have been many more bombs than hits. During the heyday of the American Musical Theatre, writers and lyricists were given ample opportunity to develop their style and to learn from experience. Nowadays a failure on Broadway is costly in terms of both money and careers. The economic factors which once motivated the musical are now destroying it; the risks involved in producing a lavish, full-scale musical are too great. Consequently, the quality and quantity of musicals have decreased, and the general state-of-the-art has reached an abysmal low.

The Musical Theatre Lab intends to create an atmosphere free from any devastating commercial pressure. Therefore a tacit agreement exists among the stars and writers of the Lab that no reviews of these shows are to be published; to review these "works in progress" would be contrary to the purpose of the Lab. The success of the Musical Theatre Lab does not guarantee that the quality of current musicals will automatically improve. But now that public taste and opinions will indicate the direction and style of the shows, which won't initially be subjected to the sometimes caustic pens of the critics, it is fair to say that at last, there is hope for the American musical theatre.

C, S, & N back together again

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Impressive cut.

Besides writing the lyrics to guest keyboardist Craig Doerge's song "Shadow Captain," Crosby contributed only two songs to the album, but both are good. "Anything at All" is a slow cut very well sung by Crosby with imaginative harmonies from Stills and Nash. "I'm My Own Dream" is a gentle daydream-like song, and one of Crosby's best.

Beyond the individual songs and performances, however, the harmony of Crosby, Stills, and Nash is what really distinguishes this album from the solo works or anything else. These three men perform vocal harmonies on "Cathedral" and on Stills' excellent "I Give You Give Blind," and in general show a unique vocal finesse.

As for Neil Young, it is perhaps better that he didn't take part. The trio has a type of unity that would be diluted by the presence of someone like Young, whose musical ideas are so much different from theirs and whose ego would again endanger the group.

At last, for now, Crosby, Stills, and Nash are together again, and the music they've made shows that they should stay that way.

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Lt. Tom Strat, '77, Course VI-3

An ROTC Scholarship winner, Tom entered MIT in September of 1973. Tom is a member of DKE, played in the MIT orchestra, was cox'n for the Heavyweight Varsity Crew, and commanded the Army ROTC Cadet Battalion during his second year. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, Regular Army in the Military Intelligence Branch in June '77. Tom was awarded an Army Fellowship and will be on active duty here at MIT pursuing a graduate degree in Computer Science. As a Fellowship student, Tom receives full Army pay ($12,000/year). He will be assigned to Fort Huachaca, Arizona upon graduation.

Lt. Bill Sweet, '77, Course X

Bill entered MIT with the class of '77 on a four-year Army Scholarship. A member and rush captain of Phi Delta Theta, Bill was captain of MIT's Lightweight Varsity Crew, and served as Operations Officer for the Army ROTC Cadet Battalion. Commissioned in the Field Artillery, Regular Army, he was awarded an Army Fellowship to MIT in the field of Engineering Operations. Upon completion of his studies at MIT, Bill and his wife Cindy look forward to a 3-year assignment in Germany.

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