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## 'Company' The Musical at Town Hall Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Marta (Giana Gambardella), Bobby (Derek Travis Collard), and April (Jade Shojaee) Photo Stu Selland

Lafayette's theater scene recently expanded its range masterfully with the opening season musical "Company." Town Hall Theatre's new director Joel Roster took a risk with this fully-choreographed live musical production, but the large cast pulls it together with grace and impeccable professionalism. Some great voices - including one that is of operatic quality - as well as outrageous acting and smashing dancing make "Company" a success that will draw crowds in.

"Company," with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, was nominated for a record 14 Tony awards when it opened on Broadway in the '70s, yet the story has not aged a bit. In fact, everyone in the audience, whether married, previously married, or not yet married, will find it relevant and thought provoking. Five married couples interact with 35-year-old bachelor Bobby, who questions his own choice of the single life and freedom, while his friends strip away their own marriages. Sometimes very funny, sometimes bittersweet, the text itself is

impeccably crafted and interesting.

The cast for "Company" introduces many newcomers to Town Hall Theatre. First is Derek Travis Collard who plays Bobby. Tall and slender, Collard is a musical actor who has credits in the Bay Area and beyond. The entire play rests on this central character, and Collard develops a range of emotion and a growing presence that pushes the quality of the play to a high level. He looks somewhat older than his 35-year-old character, but his energy, acting performance and vocal mastery more than compensate for this.

Speaking of vocals, a special mention goes to Megan Stetson (Jenny), who must have been classically trained in opera. Listening to her vibrato when she sings a solo piece is enchanting.

The play also works very well visually. With choreography directed by Jennifer Perry, Collard, with his long-legged streamlined silhouette, dances with grace, and so do his partners during the play's several group dance routines. There is also a very realistic karate duel between Megan Ihle (Sarah) and her husband, played by Vince Perry (Harry). And Roster set the piano on stage, with music director Margaret Halbig playing all evening long while the actors use the piano as a prop, turning around it, and sometimes even sitting on it.

All 14 performers have strong acting and singing skills. Susie Shepard (Amy) performs one of the funniest scenes as the hysterical bride-to-be. Shepard has a great sense of comedic timing and pushes her script to the maximum effect. On a completely different note, Jill Gould (Joanne) gives a chilling interpretation of the rich alcoholic wife; her desperation filters through her singing voice. It will give you goose bumps.

"Company" runs through Oct. 11 at Town Hall Theatre, 3535 School St., Lafayette. For more information, visit [www.townhalltheatre.com](http://www.townhalltheatre.com).

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