

# ENTERTAINMENT

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## Jan Brenner: Review — “Company” a hit at Bucks County Playhouse

A young woman walking behind me after the opening night performance of “Company” last Saturday at Bucks County Playhouse raved, “This is absolutely wonderful. I had never seen a Broadway show before.” The audience could not stop applauding and cheering during the show. She was absolutely right. This production is New York theater quality. The Stephen Sondheim show, with book by George Furth, is creative, energetic, exciting, and magical.

Director Hunter Foster with choreographer Lorin Lataro and musical director Will Shuler have produced a huge hit in New Hope, Pennsylvania. BCP producers Alex Fraser and Robyn Goodner are planning to begin the third summer season of the rebuilt, reimagined Playhouse in this glorious manner.

To the audience’s delight, Justin Guarini is terrific as he performs the role of the leading character, Bobby. He is on stage 95 percent of the time with little time to rest his voice in between songs. Guarini is a delight to watch and hear.



MANDEE KUENZEL

Chelsea Emma Franko, Gabrielle Ruiz and Anne Horak in the Bucks County Playhouse production of “Company.”

He has come a long way since almost winning the first “American Idol.” His maturity, pleasantness, acting, and voice control 14 years later stand out.

His performance is enhanced by a cast of 13 additional excellent singers, actors and dancers, all of whom show quirky personalities, have terrific voices and characterizations, and impressive credits: Candy Buckley, Max Kumangai, Anne Horak, Kate

Wetherhead, Chelsea Emma Franko, Susannah Jones, Jennifer Cody, John Bolton, John Caliendo, Laura Jordan, Steve Rosen, Gabrielle Ruiz, and Bucks County playwright, director, actor and musician John Augustine.

The performance was so smooth, so flawless, it looked like “Company” had three months of rehearsals. In fact, to prepare, this troupe had a total of only 12 rehearsals in two weeks.

Five couples — all in various stages of relationships — encourage Bobby to find a wife (“Have I Got a Girl For You?”). Bobby wants to have company in his life, but he sees the institution of marriage to be flawed, especially as he watches his friends interact with their spouses.

Two unforgettable scenes occur near the beginning of the musical.

In one, a small, competitive woman wants to show her karate skills and invites her spouse to attack her. After several encounters of one-upmanship, they land on the floor, and when Bobby tries to help them, he becomes involved.

Another scene occurs when the five couples and Bobby begin playing the game of Twister and wind up in an incredibly impossible entanglement. Kudos to director or choreographer for that hysterically funny conclusion to a friendly game.

The music is familiar: “The Little Things You Do Together,” “You Could Drive a Person Crazy,” “Another Hundred People Just Got off of the Train,” “Getting Married Today,” “Side by

Side by Side,” and “Being Alive” are just a few of the songs that were not just sung, but interpreted brilliantly.

Music, lighting, costuming, sound — all contributed to the quality of this production. A large additional benefit to the production was the use of the recently restored revolving stage (turntable) which permitted people and scenery to move seamlessly from behind and through a upstage slatted plastic backdrop.

The nine-piece orchestra was hidden somewhere — possibly behind the backdrop or in the wings, with the director in the balcony directing possibly with closed circuit TV. Fascinating.

Even if you have seen “Company” before, don’t hesitate to see this BCP treat.

Tickets are available by calling the box office at 215-862-2121 or going to bcptheater.org.

There are eight performances each week through June 21: Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7:30 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m.; 2 p.m. matinees on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

## Riverside Symphonia and Cordus Mundi team up for benefit

Male a cappella group Cordus Mundi will sing in support of the Riverside Symphonia’s 26th season when the Lambertville, N.J.-based orchestra presents a benefit event, “Voices - a Celebration in Song.”

The event takes place at the David Library of the American Revolution in Washington Crossing, at 8 p.m. Saturday, June 13.

A less formal benefit event, it is designed to give everyone a chance to both listening to and make music.

“Voices” begins in the David Library’s “Stone Hall” theater, with a program of new music and favorites from Cordus Mundi, including music from Poulenc, Chatman, Hassler, Chesnokov, Mendelssohn, Joel, Sjolund and more.

After the concert, the party



Cordus Mundi sings in June 13 benefit for Riverside Symphonia at David Library of the American Revolution.

moves to the library’s Rose Gallery for refreshments, conversation and karaoke. The invitation to sing is extended to all.

Coming near the end of a busy concert season, “Voices” is an opportunity for friends of Riverside Symphonia, Cordus Mundi and

music in general to meet, mingle and sing in a relaxed setting.

“The orchestra has been involved in some wonderful things this season both on and off-stage,” said “Voices” Chair Blanche Vilade.

“We are working hard planning for the spectacular ‘Concert Under

the Stars,’ a celebration of America’s birthday, which will be held on Friday, July 3, at Tincum Park. So we thought the time between our 25th anniversary concert and July 3 summer event was perfect for a song-filled casual evening.”

Cordus Mundi is celebrating its

10th anniversary season.

“We’re honored to be associated with Riverside Symphonia, and we’re glad to be singing at this aptly named event, since we believe that singing is for everyone,” said Cordus Mundi Founder-Artistic Director Rick Rosen.

“Whether you’re an accomplished singer, strictly a sing-in-the-shower type, or somewhere in between, singing is part of our lore, part of what makes us what we all are and it is something that belongs to all of us.”

Tickets for “Voices - a Celebration in Song” are \$75, of which \$40 is tax deductible, with all proceeds going toward Riverside Symphonia’s 26th season concert expenses. Seating is limited. For tickets or information, call 215-862-4835, or visit riversidesymphonia.org.

## Grand piano and cello recital set for St. Philip’s

St. Philip’s Episcopal Church, New Hope, presents a recital of cello and piano music by Noelle Casella and Sebastian Grand at 3 p.m. Saturday, June 13.

The husband-and-wife music team own and operate the Grand School of Music in Solebury Township. The concert is part of St. Philip’s ongoing effort to embrace the arts of the area and provide a place for all to enjoy them.

The program, “English Music for an American Afternoon,” will feature works by several British

composers, including Frank Bridge and William Henry Squire, from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The duo will also perform a rarely heard work by Beethoven, comprising variations on “God Save the King.”

Noelle Casella Grand, an American-born cellist, is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she received a Master of Arts and teaching diploma. She studied in New York at Sarah Lawrence College and at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam.

Casella Grand performs and teaches throughout Europe and the United States. She has performed the Royal Academy of Music’s Symphony, Concert and Opera orchestras, the New York Youth Symphony and the New York Consort of Viols.

Sebastian Grand is principal conductor of the Guernsey Sinfonietta and active as a pianist, conductor and educator throughout Europe and the United States.

Raised in Guernsey, Grand is a graduate of the Joint Course between the University of Man-

chester and the Royal Northern College of Music; he received a master’s degree from the Royal Academy of Music in London. He was a prizewinner at each institution. As a pianist, he is much in demand.

The event is open to the public. Donations for the musicians will be appreciated. For information, visit stphilipsnewhope.org, e-mail Michael@stphilipsnewhope.org or phone 215-862-5782.



## One Act Festival returns to Town and Country

Every year Town and Country Players on Route 263 in Buckingham gives local directors a chance to direct a one-act play on its unique, theater-in-the-round stage.

The One Act Festival is a creative challenge for the directors and a chance for T&C to find new talent. But, more importantly, the show is entertaining.

This year’s One Act Festival features three comedies. Sheldon Bruce Zeff directs “DunE.Lawn” by Terrence McNally. The play takes a comedic look at the dysfunctional relationships of three couples on a country-club retreat with their marriage counselor. At the end of the day, they are encouraged to do whatever feels good.

Local high school Director of Theater Lorie Baldwin directs “For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls.” The parody of “The Glass Menagerie” is one of Christopher Durang’s most popular one-act

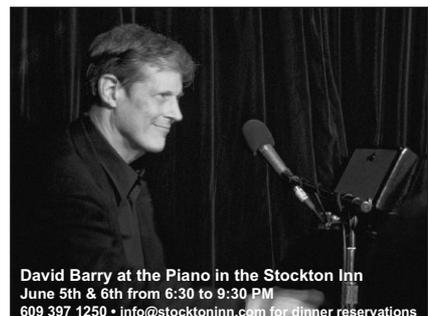


plays. It is a send-up featuring eccentric Southern characters: a fading Southern belle; her hypersensitive, hypochondriac son; the feminine caller; and Brother Tom, who keeps meeting sailors at the movies.

Alan Packard directs the romantic comedy, “A Sunny Morning” by Joaquin Alvarez Quintero and Serafin Quintero. The Spanish play is about an elderly couple reunited after many years. While sitting in a park, they realize they were young

lovers. After some comedic banter, they part ways promising to return, both knowing that they will not.

T&C’s One Act Festival runs for one weekend only, at 8 p.m. June 12 and 13, and 2 p.m. June 14. Tickets are \$10 at 800-838-3006 or on the T&C website.



David Barry at the Piano in the Stockton Inn

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## Copper Penny Players stage a Revue

Fred Miller’s Copper Penny Players will stage a Revue at 4 p.m. Sunday, June 7, at the Virginia Napurano Arts Center, 522 Rosemont-Ringoes Road in Sergeantsville, N.J.

The free program is open to the public and is followed by a buffet supper provided by the Copper Penny Players. Any contributions to the buffet are welcome.

Each participant of the Copper Penny Players, a 10-week series of singing classes, comes to Miller’s Sergeantsville studio every week to present a solo for other members of the class. No musical experience is necessary,

only a desire to sing and perform. Everyone receives basic coaching on breath support and voice placement, but the primary focus is on expression.

Running continuously since 1981, the Copper Penny Players meet Mondays at 7 p.m. at the Sergeantsville studio. After 10 weeks, members present their Revue performance for friends, fans, family and the general public followed by a potluck supper provided by the Copper Penny Players.

Contact Fred Miller at 609-397-8700 or fred@fredmillermusic.com about the new series beginning on Monday, June 8.

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