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TALKING WITH ...

Nathaniel Niemi

"Company" director talks about the third installment of Season 2 at The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol.



By **KRISTEN FIORE**
Daily Sun Staff Writer

The end of January will bring the beginning of a new show at The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol, "Company."

This third production of Season 2 continues along the season's theme of commitment.

The musical follows Bobby, played by Chris Crawford, a bachelor with a lot of married friends. Bobby isn't sure if he wants to remain single or have his own romantic partner, and the story unfolds in a series of vignettes taking place during Bobby's 35th birthday party.

The Daily Sun recently spoke with the director of the show, Nathaniel Niemi, about the elements of the play and the benefits of performing it in a black-box theater.

Why was this show picked for Season 2?

This season at The Studio Tierra Del Sol is all about commitment. "Company" so perfectly falls in line by allowing audiences to take a look at relationships and commitment alongside our

protagonist Bobby, who is doing this examination for himself. In looking at the relationships in his life, his married friends and girlfriends, he is able to see the good, bad, ugly and beautiful parts of commitment that make up the wonderful whole. Many say that it isn't the large moments that define a relationship but the small daily intimate ones. In "Company," we the audience are truly invited to these intimacies.

Does performing the show in a black-box theater alter or change the way you go about directing it?

Directing in a black-box you really have to think about the ways you use tension and focus to tell the story. You don't have the proscenium arch to frame everything you stage, which allows the staging and movement to be more three-dimensional as it invades the space. Audience members seated in one section are experiencing the show in a slightly different way than those in another

section, which I see enriching the theatrical experience.

What benefits go along with doing this performance in a black-box set-up?

Black-box is my favorite space to see theater in and also to stage pieces in. There is an intimacy between performers and the audience in a black-box space, and a certain immediacy you feel to the piece of theater. You can't escape it. In a black-box space I also feel more connected to my fellow audience members and am always interested to see how others are processing and responding to the material.

The shared experience between audience, performer and the piece itself is at its most vivid and thrilling in the black-box setting. "Company" is well suited to this space as Bobby brings the audience along with him pondering, dreaming and making starts toward commitment in his own life. There is no "fourth wall" here. Bobby is truly speaking to us and sharing his journey.

What is your favorite part about the show?

The thing I love about

this show, apart from the wonderful music, complex lyrics and hilarious vignettes, is Bobby's humanity, which we return to over and over in the piece. His desire to love and to be loved resonates deeply with the human experience of lonely longing, with all of the fear and hope that goes along with it. With brave vulnerability, Bobby lets us in and we experience his heartfelt pondering right alongside him.

Why would you recommend seeing it?

This show is a hilarious-yet-poignant look at relationships and commitment. It's wonderfully entertaining and thoughtful. The music is gorgeous and the lyrics rich — listen closely, there is much that will delight.

The characters are completely relatable. The play is sharp, intense and funny. It's also honest. Oh gosh, is it honest! This look at the rich truths of the human experience is full of poignant, heartbreaking and hilarious moments.

It is thrilling to see. Come for an evening of top-notch

entertainment and then leave with a bit of something to digest and chat about the next morning. It's musical theater at its very best.

Kristen Fiore is a staff writer with The Villages Daily Sun. She can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5270, or kristen.fiore@thevillagesmedia.com.

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