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Too Much Going on in TAP's 'Brigadoon'

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By Jeff Favre

The Aerospace Players (TAP), one of the South Bay's longer running theater companies, has in past seasons assisted its casts of local amateurs by selecting well-known musicals with catchy songs and broad humor - or at least easy to follow storylines.

"Brigadoon" doesn't follow that pattern, which makes it difficult to expect those not directly associated with members of the cast and crew to sit through 2 3/4 hours of the sentimental, operatic 1947 fantasy musical by Alan lay Lerner and Frederick Loewe.

These musically complex tunes challenge even top professionals. And director Chuck Gustafson, whose

hands are full simply blocking scenes for nearly 50 performers, has unnecessarily hampered and lengthened the production by including the several traditional Scottish style dances, most of which are beyond the actors' capabilities.

A few solid vocal performances retain some interest, but TAP does little to keep "Brigadoon" consistently entertaining

It doesn't help matters that Lerner's book has never been much more than a single idea stretched beyond the breaking point.

Set in Scotland - Gustafson added cell phones to modernize it - the story revolves around Americans Tommy and leff (Stephen Cathers and Kevin Wheaton) who stumble across a hidden town which, they learn, becomes visible only one day every 100 years. When the inhabitants go to sleep, they wake up the next day, but the world has aged a century.

There are only two problems. Tommy falls immediately in love with townswoman Fiona (Cathryn Starr) and must decide if he wants to stay in Brigadoon or leave and never see Fiona again.

And then there's Harry (Dave Fulton), who decides, after his unrequited love Jean (Laura Hecht) marries Charlie (Matt Everett), that he is going to leave Brigadoon, an action which will end the town's magic

Starr and Cathers are the bright spots in the cast. They deliver an attractive rendition of the musical's only well-known song, "Almost Like Being in Love," as well as a spirited "From This Day On." Starr has impressive range. And while Cathers' acting is stilted, his vocals soar.

Also impressive is Mandy Ju rez, who portrays the boy-crazy Meg. Her spirited version of "The Love of My Life" is a comic high point.

TAP always has an extensive cast with varying skill levels, and Gustafson finds activities for everyone in the ensemble scenes without the stage feeling overcrowded. But the several dances are overly long, particularly the first act finale, which is interrupted by a clunky choreographed sword fight.

Gustafson's most noticeable mistake is incorporating the Scottish brogue, which is quite difficult to master. Butchered accents abound and distract from what's being said; they wouldn't be missed if removed.

The scene is more effectively set by the attractive costumes and colorful set and backdrops. These visuals convey the lushness and serenity of the magical town.

Less is always more in amateur productions, and "Brigadoon" is an exercise in excess.

Jeff Favre is a freelance entertainment writer based in North Hollywood.

Brigadoon

When: Through Saturday. Thursday, 7 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 8 p.m.

Where: Armstrong Theater, Torrance Cultural Arts Center, 3330 Civic Center Drive,

Tickets: \$20; \$15 seniors, children 12 and under, and students with I.D.; call 310-781-7171.

Information: To find out more about the Aerospace Players, go to www.aeaclubs.org/theater.

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