

# One Brief, Shining Moment

PCPA's 'Camelot' Is a Stunner

BY COURTNEY HALL

"Camelot," a musical with book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner and music by Frederick Loewe; presented by PCPA Theaterfest at the Marian Theatre at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria, through July 27; continuing at the Festival Theatre in Solvang Aug. 1 through Aug. 17. Tickets are \$12 to \$18. Information and reservations: 1-800-549-7272.

The worst I can say about PCPA's production of "Camelot" is that I'm running out of superlatives with which to describe it.

To begin with, the play itself is one of the most significant offerings on the American musical stage. Lerner and Loewe were following up their enormous international success, "My Fair Lady," and were at the

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peak of their creative relationship. Loewe's musical score is among the finest ever produced for the stage—lushly melodic, evocative, and with a soul for the story it tells. Lerner's lyrics have a wit and economy that belie their melancholic poetry. Songs like "If Ever I Would Leave You," "The Simple Joys of Maidenhood," and the title piece are among the most familiar and beloved of their kind.

The Arthurian legend was naturally an appealing source for the play, having captivated our culture for a thousand years. In it, King Arthur, who values peace and justice above all else, must face the treacheries of an evil illegitimate son, Mordred. Worse, though, is the harsher pain of Queen Guenevere's love for Arthur's dearest friend, Sir Lancelot.

Lerner faced a daunting challenge in adapting the tale to the musical comedy format, and at times his script is threatened by the epic burden of his subject. Yet he manages to balance all the elements, always with an eye toward the human

frailties and joys that make this mixture of history and myth so enduring.

It's that human emphasis, along with a keen ability for storytelling, that makes director Brad Carroll's production one of the finest you're likely to see. As entertainment, the show is complete. "Camelot" is brimming with jugglers, fire eaters, and swordplay. There is dance and amusement, tender emotion, a battle between dark and light, and a symphony of ideas.

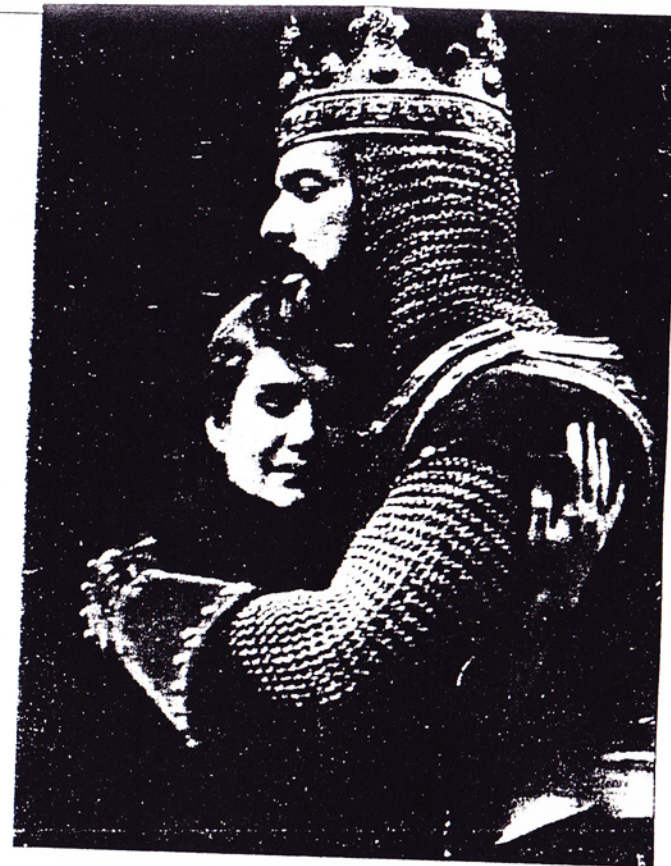
The entire company performs skillfully under Carroll's confident direction. A lively and talented ensemble fulfills Michael Gribbin's excellent musical direction with ability and passion. Choreographer Kathleen Fitz-Gerald assembles a dense mosaic of movement and period dance that the cast accomplishes with ebullient precision. They are equally competent executing Ron Heneghan's stalwart fight choreography.

In the role of King Arthur, Michael Tremblay displays a rich, resonant voice. He finds in Arthur a man of warm humor and humility. His nobility and genuine soul are made all the more meaningful by the vulnerability with which Tremblay evokes them.

Oteka Ball sings the part of Guenevere with a mellifluous voice and subtle phrasing. She gives a bright, winning performance peppered with nerve and sharp humor. Together, she and Tremblay form the core of this production, and their substantive and moving portrayals give the play its heart.

Kirk Mouser as Lancelot is also impressive, attaining the requisite vanity of the part yet finding the empathy and honor that is so often overlooked. His singing is powerful and clean.

Jonathan Gillard Daly once again offers rich and varied acting, here in a dual role. First he captures the ancient mystique of Merlyn; later, he gives a jocular turn as the loyal King Pellinore.



▪ Oteka Ball as Guenevere and Michael Tremblay as Arthur in "Camelot" at PCPA Theaterfest: What Camelot stood for remains our highest aspiration. Photo by Tom Smith/Images

Ron Heneghan makes a delightfully sly and pithy Mordred, and his song, "The Seven Deadly Virtues," is perfectly rendered. The mysterious Nimue is hauntingly voiced by Jennifer Hollar, and Kristin Prewitt is aptly wicked as the sorceress Morgan LeFey.

Carroll's direction draws these performances together and polishes them to a sheen. His work is graceful, witty, and dynamic without ever being intrusive. Above all, Carroll's staging is deeply, almost miraculously human. For a Medieval fable, it's astonishing how immediate and familiar the emotions are.

The production is marked by a succession of technical achievements done with skill and a spirit of enchantment. Costume designer Cheryl Odom has formed a luxuriant tapestry of color, character, and Medieval style. It's unfortunate that some of the wig work doesn't match this level of excellence.

R. Eric Stone's bold, imaginative set is

both inventive and evocative. Lighting designer Michael A. Peterson uses a painter's skill to expertly layer shadow, hue, and light. Eric D. Cronwall's sound design is a sublime balance of natural voice and music.

"Don't let it be forgot," sings Arthur, "that once there was a spot/For one brief shining moment/That was known as Camelot."

Camelot is gone if it ever existed at all, but what it stood for remains our highest aspiration: the call to justice at the risk of sacrifice, and love in the face of tragedy. And for one brief, shining moment on the PCPA stage, the mists of legend clear and we see the standard raised by Camelot.

It was not a flag nor a sword, but a spirit of freedom made complete in charity, hope, and love. Although Camelot has faded, these three remain. Δ

Courtney Hall is a graduate of PCPA's actor training program who later studied film production at New York University.