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## **Marry Me a Little**

Michael Van Duzer [Reviews – Theater](#)

In the early 1980's, just before Craig Lucas transitioned from performer to playwright, he approached Stephen Sondheim about using some of the composer's trunk songs in a new theatrical context. The result was *Marry Me a Little*. With his director, Norman Rene, Lucas fashioned a wisp of a concept to create a loose structure for the songs. A Man and a Woman spend a Saturday night alone in their respective apartments in the same building, 2C & 3C. The small cast, the intimate setting, and the fact that the script is dialog-free, allowing great flexibility in interpretation, meant that the show was immediately popular. Then, of course, there are the songs.

But much has changed since the original production of *Marry Me a Little*. The songs, unheard by most at that point, have been recorded numerous times over the years. Sondheim's unproduced first show, *Saturday Night*, has seen productions. Cut songs "Marry Me a Little" and "There Won't Be Trumpets" have each been replaced in their respective shows. And a number of other Sondheim revues, most famously *Putting It Together*, have "borrowed" Lucas and Rene's idea to create their own newly minted Sondheim shows. But *Marry Me a Little* is the granddaddy of those other shows and deserves respect.

Producer/Director Janet Miller is respectful in her production for the Hollywood Fringe. And the show, with its modest physical requirements, fits perfectly within the Fringe concept. Miller cleverly stages the beginning of the show to demonstrate that, despite the fact that both characters share the set simultaneously, they remain in their separate rooms. Miller allows those boundaries to blur towards the middle of the action, but they return by the end, when the characters are most definitely alone in their beds. While this is not a dance piece, Miller neatly adds more true choreography than any production I've seen.

The density of Sondheim's lyrics has often caused directors to favor verbal dexterity over great singing. By casting legit singers, Jessie Withers and David Laffey in the roles, Miller guarantees that musical values are as vital as those all-important lyrics. This, of course, means that the songs cut from the operetta-like *A Little Night Music* are given their vocal due. But Withers and Laffey are compelling and effective throughout and, as most of the songs are both rangy and vocally challenging, it is great to hear them sung without strain. Laffey is particularly moving in his rendition of "Multitudes of Amys," a song not in the original production. And, though the tone of the show is mostly melancholic, Withers has a blast with double entendres and playfully elongating her "f's" in "Can that Boys Foxtrot!" Musical Director Corey Hirsch leads a nimble reading of the score while always accompanying the singers with sensitivity.

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