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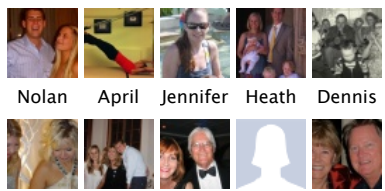
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[A Worthy Rendition of “Camelot” by The Aerospace Players](#)



Marah Studer, the Court Jester, tumbles across the stage as Lancelot prepares to joust the court’s three best knights. Photo courtesy of Mike Ibarra

Anyone who has seen a production of Lerner and Loewe’s classic musical “Camelot” would likely take issue with the title song’s claim that “there’s simply not a more congenial spot for happily-ever-aftering...” At best, the conclusion to this gut-wrenching tale of personal and political disillusionment could be considered a hopefully ever after. Even without a fairytale ending, however, South Bay theater club The Aerospace Players (TAP) gives audiences a lot to smile about with their engaging, heart-and-soul-filled rendition of the show.

Based on T. H. White’s novel *The Once and Future King*, “Camelot” revisits the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, placing special focus on the doomed love triangle of Arthur (Ronald M. Banks), Queen Guenevere (Melissa Geiger), and Arthur’s most trusted knight, Lancelot (Stephen Cathers). Actors Banks, Geiger and Cathers absolutely nail the complicated dynamic of this three-way relationship, making the woes of medieval courtly love feel relatable by filling their roles with raw, human emotion.

From the first song, “I Wonder What the King Is Doing Tonight,” Banks endears the audience to his Arthur, a reluctant king, terrified on the eve of his arranged marriage to Guenevere, whom he’s never met. With his strong combination of physical expressiveness and impeccable comedic timing, Banks delivers a multi-dimensional Arthur, expertly capturing the king’s transformation from an insecure, yet idealistic and energetic young man into a world-weary monarch nostalgic for his kingdom’s former glory.

Geiger shines as leading lady, her gorgeous soprano complementing Banks’ rich bass-baritone and Cathers’ powerful tenor. She brings a compellingly genuine quality to Guenevere, highlighting the character’s coquettish, childish behavior at times, but always with intention and without sacrificing likeability and a certain down-to-earthness. Against a very capable orchestra, conducted by Mark Agüero, Geiger’s voice soars and gracefully rises to the challenge of honoring a role originated by the inimitable Julie Andrews.

As the knight who captures the queen’s heart, Cathers’ Lancelot doesn’t immediately come across as a Robert Goulet-type heartthrob. In his first number, “C’est Moi,” he plays up the misguided arrogance and self-righteousness of the character by remaining seemingly oblivious to the shenanigans of his lackeys and the desperate flirtations of two damsels occurring right in front of him. His deadpan interpretation is hilarious, but is he convincingly swoon-worthy? A few scenes later, after a joust and an act of miraculous benevolence, the answer is a resounding “yes.” His bolt, upright posture, his swagger, and his silky, sensitive version of “If Ever I Would Leave You” leave no question as to what Guenevere risked the kingdom for.

Ultimately, the three leading actors are only part of what makes TAP’s “Camelot” successful. It’s an ambitious production with 37 cast members, most of whom perform dual functions as actors and crew. Drew Fitzsimmons, for example, takes on the role of Mordred, Arthur’s villainous, illegitimate son, in addition to serving as the show’s dance and fight choreographer. While Joe Essner, the show’s musical director, plays Tom of Warwick, the young stowaway Arthur meets on the battlefield in the final scene, who inspires him to believe there still may be hope that the idea of Camelot will endure.

This is an ambitious and astonishingly professional production, especially considering that all of its participants are volunteers. Although at three hours the show is rather long, the caliber of this production makes it time well spent.

Performances Thursday at 7 p.m., Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. Closes Feb. 11. Tickets \$24 adults, \$22 seniors and students, \$20 groups (10 people or more); \$2.50 ticket service charge if purchased through the box office, no charge if purchased through The Aerospace Players. Call (310) 781-7171 or go to www.aeclubs.org/theater.

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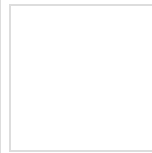
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