

## A Favorite Face, and What a Voice!

She was in the original Broadway cast of *A Little Night Music*, creating the role of Mrs. Nordstrom. Now she returns triumphantly to play wise doyenne Madame Armfeldt in SCR's opening production of the 2007-2008 season.



She also originated the role of party hostess Jenny, who discovers the delights of the illicit herb, in the 1970 Broadway debut of Stephen Sondheim's *Company*. She then traveled with the show to its London and Los Angeles runs.

Who is this singer, actress, and charter member of the Sondheim inner circle? SCR audiences know her well, from her appearances in *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Side by Side by Sondheim*, *Prelude to a Kiss*, and *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*. Welcome back, Teri Ralston!

## Isn't It Rich?

By Katie Merrill

Many young musical theatre enthusiasts are hard-pressed to place *A Little Night Music*, but as soon as you name the song "Send in the Clowns," their eyes light up in recognition. In previous generations, hit songs were often pulled out of the latest Broadway show. "Send in the Clowns" renewed that trend when Judy Collins won the 1975 Grammy Award for Song of the Year for her hit version of the Broadway ballad.

But Judy Collins wasn't the first or the last to make this standard her own; almost immediately after the musical premiered in 1973, jazz singer Sarah Vaughan adopted the song as her trademark. Frank Sinatra recorded the song in 1973 as a final farewell to his fans. He was coaxed out of retirement and into a television special that included a dramatic reading of the song, which then was included on the album "Ol' Blue Eyes is Back." In 1976, the Stan Kenton Orchestra immortalized the song on the LP entitled "Kenton '76." This recording, featuring Kenton on the piano, is widely recognized as one of the orchestra's finest performances. It wasn't until 1985 that the clowns were sent back to Broadway, when Barbra Streisand recorded a version that included an extra verse written by Sondheim on her aptly titled "Broadway Album."

This beautiful ballad continues to offer inspiration to modern musical theatre performers, as well as performers in other genres. In the 1995 London revival of *A Little Night Music*, Dame Judi Dench performed the song and Sondheim himself told her "It's yours, now." More recently in 2000 a dark, Brechtian cabaret-inspired band called the Tiger Lilies recorded the song on their album "Circus Songs." So, whatever your musical preference, there is bound to be a version of the song that moves you with its simple, heartbreaking lyrics and proves that Sondheim's music is as vibrant and rich as ever.

# A "Night" for Romance

BY MEGAN MONAGHAN

Casting a musical requires a bewitching mix of talent, technique and personal appeal — the ability to act a moment with complete conviction while sustaining a high C, or to tell a story clearly through dance without saying a word. SCR Casting Director Joanne DeNaut has searched far and wide to gather the brightest talents together for the 2007-08 season opening production on the Segerstrom Stage, Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's bittersweetly romantic *A Little Night Music*.

Drawing on Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* for its title and Ingmar Bergman's "Smiles of a Summer Night" for its story, *A Little Night Music* unravels the romantic lives of all of its characters, then knits them back up again into a new shape. Fredrik Egerman, a prominent lawyer in turn-of-the-century Sweden, is newly married to his much younger second wife Anne. Their domestic harmony is disturbed when the two attend a performance by Fredrik's past love, the famous actress Desirée Armfeldt. Anne's sexual reticence drives Fredrik back into Desirée's arms — but it's crowded in there, as Desirée is presently involved with Carl-Magnus Malcolm, a nobleman with a hair-trigger temper. When Desirée has her mother invite the Egermans for a weekend at her country estate, Carl-Magnus and his wife Charlotte crash the party. Between elegant meals

and games of croquet, the couples break up, reunite, and revolve around each other in a waltz of astonish-



ing beauty and no little playwrightly craft.

The three generations of women in the Armfeldt dynasty — Madame Armfeldt, who capitalized her beauty and charm into a comfortable living and secure retirement; Desirée, who loves "the glamorous life" but also longs for real companionship; and Fredrika, Desirée's teenaged daughter who alternates between clear-eyed realism and the pinkest of rose-colored glasses — show SCR's audiences the three smiles of a summer night which Madame Armfeldt describes to Fredrika:

*The first smile smiles at the young, who know*

*nothing.*

*The second, at the fools who know too little, like Desirée.*

*And the third at the old who know too much — like me.*

The Armfeldt women will be portrayed at SCR by UC Irvine student Katie Horwitch as young Fredrika, Stephanie Zimbalist as Desirée, and SCR favorite Teri Ralston as Madame Armfeldt (see sidebar). While Ms. Zimbalist is readily recognized for her work in film and television, she has a distinguished stage career as well. A frequent performer in Los Angeles area theatres such as the Mark Taper Forum, Pasadena Playhouse and the Rubicon in Ventura, Ms. Zimbalist's musical theatre background includes *My One and Only* with Tommy Tune and *The Threepenny Opera* with Betty Buckley.

SCR's cast for *A Little Night Music* features Damon Kirsche and Amanda Naughton as Carl-Magnus and Charlotte Malcolm, Misty Cotton as Petra, Branden McDonald (an alumnus of SCR's Professional Conservatory) as Frid, and a strong ensemble including Tracy Lore, Ann Marie Lee, Karen Culliver, Kevin McMahon and Christopher Carothers. The Egerman family includes Mark Jacoby, Carolann Sanita and Joe Farrell.

Director Stefan Novinski, a Garland Award winner for his direction of *Fen* by Caryl Churchill at Los Angeles' Open Fist theatre company and a frequent director of readings, workshops and productions at SCR, calls *A Little Night Music* "sexy, life-affirming, and adult. It's mature. It's like having a really good dinner party." He goes on to say, "It's very modern, very right now. The world we live in is all about appearances.

This piece is a very generous musical for the human condition. It acknowledges how hard it is to navigate life and love. No one really knows how to navigate life, and that has never been clearer than it is in *A Little Night Music*."

Novinski is working with two key collaborators to bring this brilliant work of musical theatre to life. Noting that "Waltzes at the time of the play were a scandal, but now they can be stiff, sterile, and nothing more than pretty," the director describes choreographer Ken Roht's work as "wonderfully human and sexy, with a vulnerable tone to his work — that's how I want Ken Roht to reinvent the waltz." Roht and Novinski have worked together before, on *Nighthawks* at the Kirk Douglas Theatre and *The Skin of Our Teeth* at the Evidence Room. At SCR, Roht choreographed *Habeas Corpus* in the 2004-2005 season.

Music director Dennis Castellano has served as music director for SCR's *A Christmas Carol* for 13 years and counting, as well as productions of *Happy End*, *A Chorus of Disapproval*, and the theatre's most recent foray into Sondheim, *Sunday in the Park with George*. In each performance of *A Little Night Music* Castellano will lead the ensemble of six musicians, who will be tucked into a niche onstage where they will be an integral part of the action.

The team of scenic designer Sibyl Wickersheimer, lighting designer Chris Akerlind, costumer Shigeru Yaji, and sound designer Drew Dalzell are creating a lush, effortlessly elegant environment that carries us from the city to the country and drenches the performances in the endless golden light of Sweden's midsummer "white nights." As the characters seek for their hearts' desires, they can use all the guidance that neverending light can give them. Yaji's costumes showcase the beauty of a bygone day and bring on an irresistible desire to waltz.

So send in the clowns... we'll be ready for them on September 7, when *A Little Night Music* has its first preview on the Segerstrom Stage.

Above, clockwise from top left, Mark Jacoby, Carolann Sanita, Joe Farrell, Stephanie Zimbalist and Teri Ralston