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['Camelot' at Pasadena Playhouse: Don't Let It Be the Final Curtain.](#)

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Little did I know on Jan. 23 when I sat in the audience watching Lerner and Loewe's "Camelot" that it would be my last time at the Pasadena Playhouse. Strangely enough, this "Camelot" represents what the theater has always symbolized. In the 1930s and thereafter, Pasadena Playhouse was the training ground for many of Hollywood's greatest young actors. This final production with a bare-bones set and minimal costuming showcases today's youthful crop. Due to the theater's dire financial woes, Pasadena Playhouse is set to close on Feb. 7 after the final curtain.

There are so few small theaters in Los Angeles like Pasadena Playhouse, which has been home to many of LA's most elite actors. The playhouse has a warm, classic mission-like feel to it. Just two summers ago I saw actress Valerie Harper give a tour-de-force performance as Tallulah Bankhead in "Looped." She is taking the show to Broadway this spring, and I feel so fortunate to have seen it. We not only need theaters like the Pasadena Playhouse to nurture young talent, but such theaters are reservoirs where actors can practice their craft, which brings me back to "Camelot."

There have no doubt been far better "Camelots." No one could surpass Richard Burton and Richard Harris as King Arthur, Robert Goulet and recently Nathan Gunn as Lancelot, or Julie Andrews as Guenevere.

In the Pasadena Playhouse version, Shannon Stoeke (Arthur) could act and sing with the best of them, but he couldn't pull off the Act 1 monologue, which should have been a showstopper. Please watch Gabriel Byrne's version on YouTube - it's exhilarating.

Shannon Warne as Guenevere couldn't match Andrews' charm or musicality. She spoke and sang in a direct fashion as if in rehearsal. I kept wondering why Arthur and Lancelot were so smitten with her. She clearly displayed a voice that could chirp pearly tones, but she chose to belt over that beauty so that what we heard was only the epidermal layer, not the gift that she was hiding beneath it.

Baritone Doug Carpenter (Lancelot) was much closer to giving us a standout performance. He has the operatic voice and good looks we associate with the role, as well as some of Lancelot's ego. He had us hooked when he sang "If Ever I Would Leave You." And even though we sensed that he needed to let down his emotional guard and move more agilely onstage, we knew that we were watching a star in the making.

Director David Lee's trimmed-down cast, set and book worked for the most part except for actions like the bow-and-arrow bird-on-a-string hunting incident which was just plain silly. Then the one minute of nakedness truly shocked us. Lee tried to make us believe that less was more, but in the case of the Lancelot-Guenevere infatuation, we drew the conclusion that his more was less. I could just see Andrews and Goulet in that fixed naked embrace. Perish the thought.

Moss Hart staged the initial production of "Camelot" so that we could use our imagination. Lee didn't have to turn this memorable Alan Jay Lerner-Frederick Loewe musical about the Knights of the Round Table into a reality show. Sometimes it's nice to spend a few hours in a candy-coated world like Camelot when the real world around us is anything but that.

Although the young cast may not have been on a par with some of the old greats, each actor-singer-dancer exuded a youthful energy that hypnotized us so that we came out humming. There is so much talent in Los Angeles County and so few beautiful old theaters to display it in. I hope from the bottom of my heart that a benefactor surfaces to save this grand old theater. It represents something so much more than just a building that has given us a few noteworthy productions. I mean, this is the Pasadena Playhouse we're talking about. I do not want to have to mourn its passing.

Credits: Pasadena Playhouse Artistic Director, Sheldon Epps; Executive Director, Stephen Eich; Stage Director, David Lee; Music Director, Christy Crawl; Choreographer, Mark Esposito; Scenic Designer, Tom Buderwitz; Costume Designer, Maggie Morgan; Lighting Designer, Michael Gilliam; Sound Designer, Vikram Kirby