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COLLEGE RING

MPC theater must both train and entertain.

By [Sue Fishkoff](#)

A college theater department is an educational institution, designed to train aspiring actors, directors and technicians for careers in the theater field. But a college theater stage is also an entertainment venue that offers live theater to the local community and, hopefully, makes a few bucks in the process.

How does Monterey Peninsula College Theater Department Chair Peter DeBono juggle those twin aims? "It's a tightrope act, really," he admits. "You want to have some end result from the teaching. Since it's a school, the educational process is primary. But I feel an obligation to offer a program of quality productions that people can afford."

MPC's real and perceived "obligation" to the public is perhaps more pronounced than for many other community colleges because of our area's interest (and talent) in the arts. MPC's Main Stage shows routinely sell out--unusual for a community college, for which DeBono thanks longtime box office manager Andrew Craig--and with more than 3,500 season ticketholders, they have a ready-made audience base. That, combined with the fact that the department gets money from the state, means that DeBono can afford to put on high-tech productions ("Which I couldn't do without [technical director] Dan Beck"), and that he feels he owes something to the local residents who are the ultimate source of his funding. "I get flak from the local theater community because our season ticket prices are so low, but we're a state-supported theater," he says. "We have the best physical plant on the Peninsula, and it was built with taxpayers' money."

One way DeBono juggles his educational and entertainment objectives is by divvying up his two theater spaces. The smaller SRO is used primarily for plays that have "more limited audience appeal," for outside directors, and as a space for students to mount their first full-length productions. The Main Stage, on the other hand, is open to the entire community--in fact, non-students play most of the leading roles, and handle most backstage work.

It wasn't always that way. When DeBono first came on board in 1971, and Morgan Stock was department chair, they had 100 students. Today, that number has dropped to 50, and many of them are married, with jobs and children, and not as eager or available for round-

the-year productions. "The MPC production schedule used to be totally student-oriented," he says. "Until '81, we cast the shows entirely from our students. Now we no longer can." That's not necessarily negative, he adds quickly. "We decided to take advantage of talent in the community by bringing in outside people to work with the students," he says. "Young acting students can learn a tremendous amount from being in productions with them."

Closing

Gypsy! Thursday (benefit performance), Friday and Saturday, 8pm; Sunday 2pm, Musical Comedy. "Everything's Coming Up Roses" for Rose, an ambitious stage mother in 1920s New York who pushes her two girls into entertainment careers. Little did she know one of them would end up bumping and grinding her way through life as Gypsy Rose Lee, whose memoirs form the basis of this popular musical. Knock-out performances are delivered by Stephanie Waldrip, as a feisty, never-say-die Rose, and Melissa Jorgenson, as the saintly Louise who explodes onto the burlesque circuit, but all the dancing and singing in this production is just great (especially the burlesque trio.) Directed by Tom McKenzie, with impressive set by guest designer Bradley Kaye. Bring the kids. MPC Main Stage, 980 Fremont St., Monterey. 646-4213. \$15/general; \$7/children; \$11/seniors. Through: 8/30.

Now Playing

Bandido! Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 8pm; Sunday, 5pm. Melodrama. El Teatro Campesino revives this musical melodrama by Luis Valdez based on the exploits of notorious Alta California bandit, Tiburcio Vasquez. El Teatro director Valdez says that without Vasquez, there would have been no Zorro, for the latter legend was based on the real-life adventures of the former, who has become a kind of cult figure in Chicano lore. Kinan Valdez plays the popular resistance fighter, Vasquez, a former resident of San Juan Bautista; Olga Lydia Urbana plays his tragic lady love, Rosario. Old Mission Pueblo, 705 4th St., San Juan Bautista. 623-2444. \$12/general; \$6/children; \$10/seniors. Through: 9/20.

Ghost of the Ozarks Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 8pm. Melodrama. Yet another in the First Theater's wide repertoire of 19th-century melodramas, this one was made into a John Wayne movie titled *The Shepherd of the Hills*. The story is set in Arkansas, but it could be anywhere U.S.A. Plenty of hissing and booing of evil villains, weeping for maidens, and cheering of stalwart heroes. California's First Theater, Scott and Pacific streets, Monterey. 375-4916. \$10/general; \$5/children; \$8/seniors. Through: 11/3.

Of Mice And Men Friday & Saturday, 8pm; Sunday, 7pm. Drama. Unicorn Theater revives their successful adaptation of Steinbeck's tale about friendship, dreams and loyalty. Rob Foster plays Lenny, with Thomas Burke and Jody Gilmore switching off as George. Unicorn Theater, 320 Hoffman Ave., Monterey. 649-0259. Through: 9/13.

Pinocchio Saturday, 2pm and 4pm; Sunday, 3pm. Children. The Unicorn Theatre interprets this classic scary fairy tale that lets kids know the terrible things that can happen to them if they tell a lie. Like, your nose can grow halfway across the room. But if you're very, very apologetic, you might be rewarded by turning from a wooden puppet into a real little boy, like Pinocchio did. Unicorn Theatre founder Carey Crockett did the rewrite on this tale, and he says he's taken out the violent, really scary parts and made it appropriate for ages 3 to 7. It's a musical, starring Unicorn company members, and may safely be enjoyed by parents together with their young children. Unicorn Theatre, 320 Hoffman Ave., Monterey. 649-0259. \$5/general; \$5/children; \$5/seniors. Through: 9/13.

Rough Crossing Friday and Saturday, 8pm. Comedy. A no-holds-barred Tom Stoppard comedy that follows two turn-of-the-century playwrights as they sail to New York to deliver their "next big play." The only problem is, they haven't written it yet. Based on *The Play's The Thing*, a 1926 comedy by P.G. Wodehouse, *Rough Crossing* treats its plotline as little more than a foil for Stoppard's non-stop wit, puns, wordplay, running gags, mistaken identities and slapstick humor. Kind of a "show about nothing," so sit back and enjoy the ride. Western Stage, Studio Theater, 156 Homestead Ave., Salinas. 755-6816/375-2111. \$15/general; \$13/seniors. Through: 9/12.

Shimmer Saturday, 7:30pm. Drama. Pacific Repertory Theater's Solo Series continues with artistic director Stephen Moorer in an award-winning "liberation" monologue about an adult looking back on his experiences as a 16-year-old growing up in a home for boys in the Midwest. Moorer is directed by Pac Rep's John Rousseau. Circle Theater at the Golden Bough, Casanova Street, between 8th and 9th avenues, Carmel. 622-0100. \$15/general; \$10/children; \$10/seniors. Through: 10/7.

Tapping the Glass Friday, 7:30pm. Drama. Jeanne Wooster presents the final offering in Pac Rep's Solo Series with her one-woman show that mixes music and monologue. *Tapping the Glass* follows Wooster through her final year of college in Philadelphia, as she tries to keep afloat by relying on her friends and her music, spending many a long night at Dirty Frank's Bar, tapping the glass "in expectation of redemption and enlightenment." Directed by Kathy Deskins-Jacobs. Circle Theater at the Golden Bough, Casanova Street between 8th and 9th avenues, Carmel. 622-0100. \$15/general; \$10/children; \$10/seniors. Through: 10/10.

The Wizard of Oz Thursday through Sunday, 8 pm. Musical Comedy. Judy Garland sang her way into America's hearts in the MGM motion picture, which has become arguably the most famous family musical of all time. Pacific Repertory Theater brings all the songs, dances, and 60 munchkins to the outdoor Forest Theater stage, using the Royal Shakespeare Company's script adaptation. Walt deFaria directs Melani Mesiroff as Dorothy, and choreographer Gloria Elber tries to keep the in-line skating monkeys from flying off the stage inadvertently. Follow the yellow brick road to the Emerald City, and whatever you do, pay no attention to that little man behind the screen! Outdoor Forest Theater, Santa Rita Street and Mountain View Avenue, Carmel. 622-0100. \$15/general; \$10/children; \$10/seniors. Through: 9/20.

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