

 [Print this article](#) |  [Close this window](#)

Merrily We Roll Along

Reviewed by Michael Shmith
September 29, 2010 - 3:00AM

Sondheim
Elisabeth Murdoch Hall
September 27

THIS, the centre panel of *A Sondheim Triptych* being held to celebrate King Stephen's 80th birthday, falls in his creative chronology between *Sweeney Todd* (1979) and *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984). While neither as brilliant nor as historically based as these landmark works, *Merrily We Roll Along* contains some ingenious songs, but a fairly creaky book by George Furth.

Adapted and updated from a 1930s play, this musical could equally be called *Along Roll We Merrily*, since its narrative is in reverse. Moving backwards, as distinct from forwards, it chronicles the complex lives of three friends - Franklin, a songwriter turned movie mogul; Charlie, the faithful lyricist; and Mary, the fragile writer - from their estrangement in the mid-1970s back to their first meeting, on an East Side rooftop in 1957. It is anything but merry. Stephen Sondheim leads us into the dark of failed friendship and scuppered marriages; but there are lighter times to be had.

Shaun Murphy's neat production, with its cast of 15 and six musicians, achieved much, and, perhaps, made the piece more worth its while than it really is (its 1981 season ran on Broadway for just 16 performances). Chris Parker (pictured, with Hester van der Vyver), Laura Fitzpatrick and Stephen Wheat were first-rate as Franklin and his confreres; and there were notable performances from Lisa-Marie Parker, Hester van der Vyver and Darren Natale. Ben Kiley's expert music direction kept things moving, but some curious uncredited choreography got in the way.

Yet, such an enterprise proved that even sub-standard Sondheim can be entertaining and enlightening. It was good to experience this rarity, and the audience loved it.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/theatre/merrily-we-roll-along-20100928-15vxn.html>