File Saturday, December 10, 1994. THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE #1.

Mer of a musical

Theater Review

Performances and Tickets: Thursday-Company at Los Angeles Theatre Center, 514 S. Spring St., Los Angeles. Where: Los Angeles Repertory

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"enisseseA" ley, who wounded Ronald Reagan,

Charles J. Guiteau, who shot

The least known and in some

teau, played as something of a

sight, will never be healed. Gui-

says with unhappy prophetic in-

the Civil War, whose wounds, he

Tom Zemon, blames Lincoln for

somehow his or her right to happi-

show, and each does feel that

song, "Everybody Has the Right to be Happy," which also closes the

"most" because not all had the

they think they can correct. (I say

dous injustice in America which

and most feel a sense of tremen-

way rejected, by parents or society,

threads appear. Most were in some

murderous acts a few common

on. During a shootout on the plane

White House and kill Richard Nix-

with intent to crash it into the

to hijack a commercial jetliner

is Samuel Byck, who in 1974 tried

ways the most unusual of the group

As they attempt to justify their

They are united in the opening

ness has been stolen.

same motivations.)

he killed himself.

Booth, a handsome, aristocratic

history.

finger, to change the course of

how easy it is for a random individual, just by squeezing one

Despite such absurdities it's a powerful show, and Sondheim's "Gun Song" makes it all too clear

Join in this urging, although their

instead, and the others come in to

talk him into shooting Kennedy

kill himself. Then Booth appears to

Book Depository intending only to

coming to work at the Texas School

quence has Oswald (John Allee)

parents and society in general.

and grievances against his wealthy

man with a fixation on Jodie Foster

plays Hinkley as a repressed young

system is. Steve Jackson Wilde

ravings about how rotten the whole

some rambling, barely coherent

slave wages who blamed the whole

by Sean Smith, was a laborer at

France. Czolgosz, strongly played

pointed him ambassador to

thought Garfield should have ap-

confidence man by Alan Safler,

capitalist system for his lot.

Paul W. Carr as Byck engages in

The show's most absurd se-

reasons are not clear.

assassin. Harvey Oswald, John F. Kennedy's the life of Gerald Ford, and Lee both of whom made attempts on Fromme and Sarah Jane Moore,

Anton Cermak; Lynette "Squeaky" and instead killed Chicago Mayor lin D. Roosevelt in a motorcade seppe Zangara, who fired at Frankkiller of President McKinley; Giu-President Garfield; Leon Czolgosz, these others:

out and, with the stunning perfor-But in the intimacy of the Los to the literal minded. p poth aggravating and confusing

and loose with history in a way that Sondheim and Weidman play fast

ey. There is no story line, and

John Wilkes Booth to John Hinck-United States presidents, from

to snissess ad-bluow to snisses

enpleasant, dealing with nine as-

York. The subject matter is notably

show would be a failure in New

run, through Jan, 15. It is understandable why the

Week extension of its scheduled

performances resulting in a two-

There it has enjoyed sold-out

if in the 90-seat Theater 4 of Los

· year in his company's presenting it

. the rights to it finally resulted this

the show, and his efforts to obtain

Angeles Repertory Company liked

But Peter Ellenstein of the Los

production to a big Los Angeles

It was not a success, and there was

sins" opened in New York in 1991

John Weidman musical "Assas-

· When the Stephen Sondheim-

. 'Assassins' a winner.

intimate setting make

performances in an

the often surreal

The Press-Enterprise

By T.E. Foreman

▶ Magnetic

. no movement to bring a major

- Angeles Theatre Center.

You may object to one sequence with the drama. the frequent humor that goes along absurdities presented and enjoy ny cast, can accept the seeming mances by the Repertory Compain the individual dramas played can become more closely absorbed Angeles production the audience

er of President Lincoln, and Hinckincludes, in addition to Booth, killof actual or would-be assassins The Sondheim-Weidman gallery frequent brilliance of its execution. the daring of the concept and the or another, but you have to admire

MUSICAL PICK OF THE WEEK By Archie Rothman

Assassins: The daringly different, powerfully provocative Stephen Sondheim musical is finally in LA and it's great!

Only Stephen Sondheim, who defied theatrical convention by making a musical about Sweeney Todd The Demon Barber of Fleet Street who made meat pies out of bodies, could have created a musical about the most notorious assassins in U.S. history. The concept was too "different" to open on Broadway, or find an audience in its brief two-month run at the small off-Broadway Playwrights Horizons Theatre.

Obviously it was also too much of a risk for LA's major theatres, so Assassins remained in limbo for almost four years, with the only way to appreciate it being a superb RCA original cast recording. Until now, with the excellent Los Angles Repertory Company production at the LA Theatre Center. For reasons why they did it I'll quote these words to theatre critics from Peter Ellenstein, Managing Director:

"I was attracted to Assassins for several reasons. The first two were obvious the chance to work on anything written by Mr. Sondheim, and the thrill of hosting the LA premiere. Beyond that, I found the subject matter intriguing - a chance to look at society from the bottom up.

Assassins deals chiefly with three

Assassins deals chiefly with three things: Love, broken promises, and guns. A volatile mixture. The authors ask us to step back before the point of assassination and to see these dangerously miserable people as human beings, not monsters. The assassins desperate langings, for all that they will never get, would be tragic if their despair didn't turn into vengeance. Unfortunately, that personal vengeance has affected all of us, the nation, and the course of history.

vengeance has affected all or us, me nation, and the course of history.

Though the play is filled with laughter, Assasins is no attempt to glorify the people of their acts, but to put them into the context of America. In learning about these horrible (and all too frequent) acts of the past, instead of ignoring them as random, perhaps we can begin to understand why they occur, and how to prevent our world from being shaped by violent anger."

Everything about Assassins is brilliantly presented. From the opening scene, a carnival's shooting gallery, where the assassins enter one by one and are encouraged by the proprietor to solve their problems by picking up a gun, to the use of a Balladeer, who throughout the show sings us our history and drifts through assassinations as a professional witness to American catastrophe.

His songs introduce John Wilkes Booth, Lee Harvey Oswald, McKinley's



assassin, those who attempted killing FDR, Ronald Reagen, Gerald Ford, etc.

Each assassin close-up is dramatically and musically staged in different ways, to represent the changing locales and times. Yet it all flows so smoothly, without a break in the action, with scenes and characters dove-tailing into each other.

In fact, the entire production is a credit to the honored 28-year-old LA. Repertory Company now headquarted in downtown's theatre center, its director, and the uniformally fine 19-member cast, especially Tom Zemon as Booth, John Allee as Osswald, Bridget Hoffman as Fromme, & Timothy Smith as the balladeer.

Assassins plays Thurs-Sat at 8, Sun. at 2 and 7. Call 213-485-1681 for tix/inf.

P.S. Complimentary limousine service is available to the Los Angeles Theatre Center when dining at the Sheraton Grande Hotel's (333 S. Figueroa St.) Back Porch or Scarlatti Resturants. I and a friend availed ourself of this service by having a magnificent Sunday brunch at 12, and then being chauffered to the theatre for the 2 pm matinee. The food was great. The service spectacular. The valet parking free. This free parking is also available when attending the next door Laemmle movie theatre. Call the hotel at 213-617-1133 for reservations.