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Mr. Bengford

Tech Period 4

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*Flower Drum Song* Critique

On November 9, I watched *Flower Drum Song*, a re-written musical based on the original 1957 novel of the same name. It was re-written by David Henry Hwang, Richard Rodgers, and Oscar Hammerstein II. It was presented by the American Musical Theatre of San Jose at the San Jose Center for Performing Arts. *Flower Drum Song* was a love story about a Chinese immigrant, Mei-Li, who left for San Francisco after the Communists took her father. She gets a job from one of her father's friends in Chinatown, who runs a traditional Chinese opera by day and his son runs a less traditional nightclub by evening. Mei-Li starts to fall for Ta, who is in love with one of his dancers at his show. After a huge success with the nightclub, Ta rejects Mei-Li, and she leaves the nightclub. However, Ta soon realizes that he made a mistake, and he and Mei-Li reunite.

During the prologue scene, there were not that many props or sets. As soon as the first scene started, I marveled at Robin Wagner's set design. It really set the feeling of Chinatown when first appearing because it was so recognizable. It was a huge traditional red gate that posed as different places while not being altered. If needed to become a different place, then certain props were placed or hung on it. The depth of the gate, or the illusion of it, also impressed me. It appeared to have a back portion where the dancers of the nightclub could come out. The gate

also had a ledge on top of it where actors were able to stand on, which must have needed a lot of bracing and support. If the gate was not needed, then a scrim was simply dropped in front of it, rendering it nearly invisible with the lights not focused on it.

The costume designs by Gregg Barne were amazing! My family and I were in the second row so we were able to see all the intricate details up close. The traditional opera clothes were just one of my favorites. The detail of the threading and sequins on the outfit was beautiful. The fabric glittered and flowed as the actors moved across the stage. I also enjoyed the outfits from the nightclub because they were so entertaining. In the “Gliding Through My Memoree” act, I liked the costumes of the girls. They were of the stereotypical type because you needed to recognize the country right away. The hair reminded me of *Beach Blanket Babylon* because it was exaggerated. I thought the “Chop Suey” costumes were great because they looked so light judging from the type of fabric, yet they had lights inside them.

I was excited to see *Flower Drum Song* from the start, but the set design by Robin Wagner and the costume designs by Gregg Barne really completed the expectation. Unfortunately, I was not able to see if there was any type of gobos or special lighting effects used because I was so close, which I was also looking forward to seeing. However, being able to see the costumes up close and in detail was well worth the seats, and I thoroughly enjoyed the whole musical.