Life after divorce is a big laugh

By Jim Rutter
FOR THE INQUIRER

Ali Vardar’s The Divorcees Club proves one thing: The French are no more sophisticated than we are.

Sure, they can boast the literary brilliance of novelist Michel Houellebecq and the biting satire of Charlie Hebdo magazine, but their biggest theatrical hit of the last two decades hasn’t been the intellectually loaded dramas of Yasmina Reza (Art, God of Carnage), but Vardar’s mindless 2003 comedy.

The raunchy, riotous, Americanized U.S. premiere at Penn’s Landing Playhouse shows why. The Divorcees Club starts with a too-familiar situation: Bethany (Aileen Goldberg) is a recently divorced, nearing-middle-age woman trying to piece her life back together after dissolving her marriage because she was dissatisfied with her husband. Though she can boast a Mayflower heritage, she can’t pay the rent on her posh Walnut Street apartment and seeks roommates, with the stipulation that they must also be divorced women.

In this 90-minute three-hander, she takes the first two women who answer her ad. And the hilarity of this situation comedy begins the moment South Carolina small-town Bridget (Stephen Croce) (yes, Stephen) drags her luggage in the door.

Bridget unleashes an evening-long torrent of unintentionally self-deprecating anecdotes and biting insults, most directed at the third roommate, Marie (Kellie Cooper), a South Jersey tart who parades around wearing little but an idiot’s understanding of each situation. That Croce plays the role in drag only accentuates the nasty humor, letting us jeer at an outwardly hideous, yet ultimately sympathetic woman.

Vardar retooled the show for its English translation at the 2006 Edinburgh Fringe Festival and threaded in local details for Philadelphia audiences. A few references (TV’s The Dating Game and

THEATER REVIEW

The Divorcees Club
Through March 22 at the Penn’s Landing Playhouse, Independence Seaport Museum, Columbus Boulevard and Walnut Street
Tickets: $25-$65.
Information: 855-448-7469 or www.piplayhouse.com

print-media personal ads) date the piece.

No matter. Director Hazis Vardar (the playwright’s brother) ploughs ahead through any line that sounds awkward or doesn’t score laughs, and the three talented actors never shy away from a ridiculous aside or diversion. If every joke is a nail, they’re pounding them home with sledgehammers.

Despite the show’s brevity, it’s made me laugh more than any other production in years. Whatever social commentary the French version may have lost in translation, this richly funny play offers a welcome evening of meaningless entertainment in a spring theater season filled with serious, sophisticated dramas.
(PCM) Starting over is a good theme for the new show, *The Divorcees Club*.

The zany comedy at Penn's Landing Playhouse, now playing through March 22, is the American adaptation of a French farce that played to appreciative audiences in Paris for several years.

*The Divorcees Club* is about three “women” who are licking their wounds and is also a perfect way to spend a chilly afternoon or evening with a group of Philly girl friends.

The premise is this: Bethany (Aileen Goldberg), a Main Line socialite, has recently divorced and is looking for two roommates to share the rent and expenses at her Philly apartment.

Soon her life is blended with Marie, the bimbo from New Jersey, (Kellie Cooper), and Bridget, the country gal, (Stephen Croce), and the three try to find new men in their lives.

These three women, who seem to have nothing in common, forge a friendship based on solidarity.

In what could be considered a fitting tribute to Jack Lemmon’s character in *Some Like It Hot*, stage and screen veteran, Stephen Croce steps into Bridget’s high heels, reprising the role he perfected in Paris, where he made his home for 15 years.

He collaborated with playwright Hazis Vardar, the director and co-producer of this show, during the auditions for the original English translation of *Le Clan des Divorcees*, which was first performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2006.
While living in France, Croce toured extensively with the Oz Theatre Company, performing various roles in original musical comedies including *Dracula Rock*, *Melody for Murder* and *Trouble in Cactus County*.

His credits include: the European tours of *Hair* as Woof and *The Rocky Horror Show* as Eddie/Dr. Scott. Stephen also enjoyed a run of many years as Jake Blues with The French Connection Band playing all over France, Italy and Switzerland to great acclaim.

Croce’s film credits include *Transporter 3*, *La Mome* and *Arthur* in *The War between the Worlds*. He has written and recorded music for many TV and film projects, and worked as a voiceover actor for documentaries and cartoons.

Q: What are your hopes for your show, The Divorcees Club?

Stephen Croce: My hope is that we have support to run through March 22, or longer, and that people enjoy this hysterical show. Let’s face it: it’s good to laugh.

Q: Oh, yes.

SC: One of the reasons I became an entertainer is that I have the ability to make people laugh. The world can be a scary place and laughter makes it better.

Q: What do you see for the future of the show?

SC: Our biggest hopes and dreams is to take it on tour bigger cities and have it run in New York City, that would be ideal. Especially, because Manhattan is close to where I live in Rhinebeck, N.Y., with my girlfriend and our two daughters.

Q: What is your favorite part of the show?

SC: It all depends on how the performance is going. I love the bit with the toilet seat and one reason why is that I am a man and my lady and her daughters are always getting on me to put the seat down.
Q: You occasionally add some improv to the show – am I right?
SC: Yes, the other day I smashed a bag of rice on the table to make my point and Marie ran around on bare feet on the rice, and it was pretty funny.

Q: The audience is a key ingredient in the success of the show.
SC: Oh, yes. This show is slapstick, a laugh a minute and so much of the show depends on the audience.

Q: How do you see your character Bridget?
SC: I would say that Bridget reminds me of several different women in my life, especially when I was younger. I had a couple of aunts who were very strong women, and definitely were not shy about voicing strong opinion. I am half Irish and half Italian so I took a little bit from each of them.

Q: What else was involved in shaping this country gal?
SC: I took the script and my interpretation is that Bridget is a “take charge” type of person, and I took that and fleshed out the character with actions, motions and inflections in the voice. In some ways she is nothing but a down home girl and a bit of a mother hen, but she has street smarts.

Q: Were there challenges in playing the opposite sex?
SC: No, I don’t find it that hard to play a woman on the stage. I’m a man and I’m straight, when we get on stage they see me as a woman. When I’m on stage, I feel like one of my great aunts off the boat from Italy – it’s really funny how it just comes out.

Q: You and your co-stars seem like life-long pals. Is this the case?
SC: No. We met the first time at the end of November at a photo shoot. But our ensuing friendship has enriched the play. When the play starts they are all strangers, but we become roommates and take that journey to come to care a little bit more about one another.

Q: How did the play gel for you?
SC: We had an intense two week period of rehearsal where we did develop fast friendships. When you are in close quarters with people it is natural to develop a feeling and caring for them. There is a real need for camaraderie amongst a cast. The whole show is dependent on everyone trusting, being aware and caring for each other. You get to know each others acting style and which buttons to push – it’s a working rapport.

Q: Who is coming to this show?
SC: Girls night out pals. Divorced women. Couples. Everyone. I spoke to a few women who read about the show and called more divorced friends to come and see it.

Q: What was their reaction?
SC: They said they were very happily surprised by its zaniness and wackiness, and were working on getting more their divorced friends to become members of the club. I heard people say they were happy to have 90 minutes to laugh and a few recent audience members promised to come back and see the show a second time.
Q: You are from the Philly-New Jersey area – right?

SC: Yes. I was born in Camden and grew up in Pennsauken, N.J.

Q: You lived in Paris for 15 years – it must have been a difficult transition back to American life.

SC: Yes. America is a different beast then when I was here last. It is hard to believe how much the country had changed and how much I had grown. I tell people who want to travel and live in another country to set down roots. but when you do you are really leaving another home. Leaving after 15 years was not an easy thing to do.

Q: What do you miss from your life in Paris?

SC: I miss quite a few friends, the culture and the professional opportunities there. There is a lot of voice over, cartoon work, film work, and stage work for an actor. It is a different way of looking at life. In France they work to live and the US we live to work. When you are an artist in France you are somewhat revered.

For tickets or information call: 855-448-7469. Use code CLUB8 on Wed, Thurs and Fri; or CLUB9 on Sat. or Sunday for $10 off tickets.
Croce continuing comedic care in 'The Divorces Club'

A former Queen Village-based actor is again drawing laughs by playing a fiery female.

By Joseph Myers  Posted Mar. 12, 2015  |  Comments: 0  |  (0) Add Comment

She had followed his initial interest in environmental advocacy. Stephen Croce would have become a forest ranger, a vocation with an extremely identifiable wardrobe. Though he retains an infatuation with conservation, he has developed a preference for promoting the power of laughter. Through March 22, the 57-year-old is preserving levity through "The Divorces Club," a rollicking reflection on relationships in which his attire plays a vital part as he is portraying Bridget, one of three members of the titular clique.

"She's got the ex-Queen Village inhabitant said of his character, whom press materials have dubbed "The Country Girl" owing to her South Carolina roots. "She's brassy, smart and funny, and I'm loving the role because it's not often a performer can play someone of the opposite sex and because I'm establishing a rapport with the audience by breaking the fourth wall."

Croce is crafting his portrayal of Bridget, whose roommates have also discovered the difficulties of forging fruitful unions. For the first time in the United States, having handled the original English translation of 2009's "Le Clan des Divorces" in the 196 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Calling the piece "a zany comedy," he extolms its accessibility and lauds its lessons, particularly appreciating the rarity of making truly great friendships.

"We have to nourish and keep those because they keep us grounded," the thespian mused. "Bridget, who's almost like a cartoon, makes that so humorously apparent."

Having learned late last summer of plans for a Philadelphia production, Croce, not immediately aware that brothers and show originators Ali and Haniy Vardar desired for him to reprise his involvement, scored the part on Halloween. With seasonal gardening work concluding in November, he commenced his comprehension of the revised text in December, with the first curtain rising occurring Jan. 14.

"It was an intense preparation period," he said, noting that the body energy surrounding his execution had not dipped one bit. "Almost two months in, I have a much deeper appreciation for the role and am fortunate to be working with great people. That's always inspiring."

Overseers have dubbed the Penn's Landing Playhouse offering, with action occurring within The Independence Seaport Museum, a look at "movin' in and movin' on," with Croce, who finds himself thrilled with his assignment's envelopment of chances for reconnections with viewers whom he knows well based on their shared South Jersey roots, stressing that stressing over setbacks will rarely yield solutions.
"We have to recognize and sometimes reorder our priorities, especially with respect to love," he said. "That's another moral that people can take from the show. We might have many romances or one great one, but that doesn't mean we have to forget about our friends along the way."

As a Pennsylvania-reared youth, the Camden-born individual benefited from connections comparable to those among his stage colleagues. Though a member of a very musically-inclined clan, he strayed from fully considering a calling within the creative realm, instead feeling he would find something more viable.

"I'm a bit of an idealist, so I thought protecting the environment would offer me a means to give back to society," Croce, who acquired an environmental science degree from Stockton State College, now Stockton University, said. "Eventually, I realized I could do the same thing by entertaining."

Catching a theater performance during Croce's senior year of college, an agent inspired his move to New York, where science proved his premier moneymaker, with the Garden State native finding work as a chemist. Singing and experimental theater occupied him next, but during a poor spell, he thought to broaden his reach by considering broadcast work - perhaps a love for sports. Shortly before deciding to chronicle the feats of others, he heard from a Switzerland-in-styled theater entity, leading to European tours that gave observers opportunities to document his prowess.

"What great adventures I had!" Croce beamed of roles as Woof in "Hair" and Eddie, Dr. Scott in "The Rocky Horror Show." "To have seen so many places and witnessed so much culture, that was unforgettable."

Paris, another haven for history, served as his residence for 15 years and offered a plethora of triumphs, including on Theatre Co. employment on works such as "Drama Rock," "Melody for Murder," and "Trouble in Caktion County," membership as Fake Sines in The French Connection Band, which also took him to Italy and Switzerland, and music and recording duties for film and television.

"Rarely a dull moment, right?" Croce, also a voice-over talent for cartoons and documentaries, said when reflecting on his credits. "By no means do I want to think I'm anywhere near the end, but when I look back, I think I've been very fortunate."

Like his current embodiment, whose space mates, Bethany and Marie, offer gratitude for their exchanges, the actor values the value of friendship, noting the Vardar siblings have won his eternal respect for placing such trust in his skills. Centering on being the center of attention throughout his career, Croce regards "The Divorcees Club," whose promotional poster indeed features him in the middle, not as an outlet for him to dominate but as a channel for championing camaraderie and artistic immersion.

"People are coming to laugh, obviously, and having me playing a woman in a woman's world is going to help, but there's more to it than that," he confessed. "We're not looking to be overly philosophical, but it does help that we're having love, romantic, friendly, self-infused, whatever you'd like.

With regards to love in his own life, Croce, along with cherishing his chances to perform for acquaintances, is enjoying bliss with Tamaras, his girlfriend of three years, and her two daughters, whom he has come to count as his own. A multiple-laughter-a-minute element of "The Divorcees Club," he considers his real-life company the most compelling blessing and provider of perspective.

"Man, woman, whatever, we need support and people to support," he said. "Love doesn't stop the world; it makes it go round."

For tickets, call 855-448-7469, or visit thedivorceesclub.com.

Contact Managing Editor Joseph Myers at myers@southphillyreview.com or ext. 124.
Hey MMT Fam! I wanted to share this review today, before I get settled in to watch the Superbowl – which mostly equates to me waiting to see the halftime performance that includes fine-as-all-get-out Lenny Kravitz this year! Okay, I’m back! 😊 So last week, I got to check out the US premiere of the French play The Divorcees Club – which is playing here in Philly at the Penn’s Landing Playhouse through March 22.
The comedy tells the story of three roommates, Bethany "the stiff socialite" (Aileen Goldberg), Bridget "the rough country lady" with very small emphasis on lady as the role is portrayed the very masculine Stephen Croce, and Marie who is played "stereotypical airhead blonde" to the hilt by Kellie Cooper. All three actors transition through scenes non-stop through the hour and a half romp — that takes you from Marie and Bridget’s initial encounters with Bethany, who is seeking roommates for an apartment after her recent divorce, through a series of miscommunication, arguments, cheap shots, and bonding.

As I watched the play, I couldn’t help but draw comparisons to the 70-80’s sitcom “Three’s Company,” and coincidentally the show ended while part of the sitcom’s theme played. The comedy also consists of a lot of lewd humor, and the very inappropriate “Benny Hill” theme music (shout out to the old school folks who remember that show) played at one point in between scenes.

While I did laugh at many of the jokes, which are mostly slapstick and/or lewd, there were a couple that seemed like they may have worked in another country but needed adjusting for an American audience – i.e. Marie’s claim that her ex’s “true colors” were exposed later in their relationship and the punchline being that he was black. Both my companion, who is a white woman going through a divorce from a black man, and myself were not amused and really didn’t get the punchline – so Marie married a black man, but didn’t know right away! – but we rolled with the story anyway despite feeling that particular joke was in poor taste.

The play culminates with the women bonding, after what could be the most unfortunate date night portrayed ever on stage. It appears that a lesson in friendship and setting priorities is cemented; however some of the choices made by the characters could leave the audience wondering how long that lesson would truly last.

All in all, The Divorcees Club is a comedy that doesn’t at all take itself too seriously and aims to entertain and gain laughs — at all costs. As Stephen Croce (Bridget) stated at the end of the play “If you liked the play tell somebody, and if you didn’t like the play (still tell somebody)” So if you enjoy “Three’s Company,” with a mix of Benny Hill and can handle some off-color (pun intended) humor, this is the play for you. For me, some of the jokes landed and some were far off. The comedy is running here in Philly through March 22, so check it out for yourself and let me know your thoughts. When purchasing tickets, you can use code CLUB8 to save $10 off the best seats for Wed, Thurs, and Fri and code CLUB9 for Sat and Sun shows. Get additional show and ticket information at the official website here.

Until next thought family, Thomasena
30-Second Reviews: "The Divorces Club" and Koresh's "Love at the Barnes"

By Bill Chevénent
February 16, 2015

The Divorces Club at the Penn's Landing Playhouse
Philadelphia Weekly

Overall vibe:pring and sassy, but not of the sort the former. The play was written by a Belgian between 2002 and 2013 and other successful hits across Europe, touches down with a Philly premiere.

The Divorces Club is set in a Parisian restaurant named "Papa John's" in a series of ten interiors. It is not a pleasant place, it is not a pleasant time, and it is not a pleasant place to be. However, the play is full of wit and wisdom, and it is not a bad place to be.

The play is set in a Parisian restaurant named "Papa John's" in a series of ten interiors. It is not a pleasant place, it is not a pleasant time, and it is not a pleasant place to be. However, the play is full of wit and wisdom, and it is not a bad place to be.

See, the story is quite simple, and it is well-told. Some thoughtful and heartwarming lessons. Darnell's apartment in the 4105 block of Walnut Street is suddenly filled with memories when she dump her chance at making it as a writer in Manhattan and moves back down to her blond hair. She takes the first two apartments, the one on the left, the rough and tumble, straight-shooting, country bungalow in the gemstone, the other on the right. She moves in and out of them, and the man can be seen just outside the window, and the woman inside the window, and the man in the window, and the woman in the window.

The most memorable moment: It is an unexpected twist at the performance end and all of a sudden the last two of them got a call for help. Promoting the show, Stephen Coorick took his bag off the stage and passed it to a man in a nice shirt. They got into the car, and drove off into the night. They went home. They didn't get home. They didn't get home. They didn't get home.

Scene stealers: Millie Cooper, who played the role of a businesswoman, and Alex, who made a family, and the other, who made a family.

Tourist tips: Koresh's "Love at the Barnes" is a must-see. Not only because of the stunning performance, but also because of the stunning scenery. The Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia is a beautiful place to visit, and it is a must-see for anyone who enjoys art. The museum is located in the Center City neighborhood, and it is easily accessible by public transportation. The museum is open from 10am to 5pm, and it is closed on Mondays. The price of admission is $20, but there are discounts available for students, seniors, and children. The museum also offers tours, which are available on a first-come, first-served basis. The tours are conducted by knowledgeable and friendly guides, and they provide a unique perspective on the art on display. The museum is a great place to spend an afternoon, and it is a must-see for anyone who enjoys art.
Overall vibe: Funny and bizarre, but more of the latter than the former. This play was written by a Belgian between 2000 and '03 and, after successful runs across France, touches down with a Philly premiere tweaked to localize it with welcome, familiar details. But mark my words: The Divorcees Club is not a Barrymore winner. Still, I refuse to tear it up. It is not an artistic achievement, it is not high-brow, and it is not for folks looking for some kind of mindful revelation. You will not stroll out of the theater inside the Philadelphia Seaport Museum with tear-stained cheeks or profound observations about courtship and romantic candor. But you will have at least a half-dozen moments bouncing around your brain that you'll need to get off your chest with your date: Was that a Linkin Park joke? Sarah Palin's being able to see Russia from her front porch was funny in 2008, right? Was Bridget vaguely monstrous as a character because she's the one in drag? Was breaking the fourth wall helpful or functional as a performance device?

See, the story is quite simple, and it does yield some thoughtful thematic lessons. Bethany's apartment on the 2400 block of Walnut Street is suddenly filled up with roommates when she dumps her cheese-making husband in Wisconsin and moves back closer to her Main Line-moneyed roots. She takes the first two applicants for rooms: Bridget, the rough-and-tumble, straight-shootin' country bumpkin (in drag), and Marie, the "not-so-exotic bimbo from New Jersey." Together, they learn they don't need a man to be content (and that men can be used just like women in a pinch) and that courting one for keeping needn't be at the expense of your often much-more-rewarding friendships. Or your psychological health. When they start filling personals, that's when things get more interesting in ways than perhaps the initial text intended: How do we describe ourselves if we're being honest? What aspects of ourselves do we hide when we're trying to look attractive?

Most memorable moment: In an unexpected twist, at the production's end and after a bow, the cast let down their guard to ask for help promoting the show. Stephen Crouse took his wig off and quipped to a man in the first row, "Had you fooled, didn't I?" Word of mouth is typically the best way to put butts in seats, and they need it. I don't recommend it, and every piece of performative art will do something for everyone. But, ya know, if you have it in your heart, do a good deed, and make a night of it with this quirky Club.

Scene stealer: Kellee Cooper managed a wonderfully-ditzy bimbo, and Aileen Goldberg nicely landed the buttoned-up stiff-upper-lip bitchiness of a suburban rich girl. But all eyes were on Crouse as Bridget. Her eye makeup and wardrobe is so off-kilter, it's mesmerizing.

Through Sun., March 22. $25-$55, Pen's Landing Playhouse, 211 Columbus Blvd., 855.448.7469, plpplayhouse.com
Overall vibe: Extreme sophisticated beauty. Thanks to the unique and new partnership with Roni Koresh’s dance company and the Barnes Foundation, they turned the atrium just beyond the entrance lobby into an event space with high-top tables, benches and a bar. You walked into dim lighting and a long landing strip of space surrounded by perched art and dance fans. The Valentine’s Day vibes were strong but light-hearted; it was a relief, as a single person, to be in such a drop-dead gorgeous space with a buddy and not moping at home in sweatpants. Though “Love” would certainly be a central topic explored with the company’s short dance performance, I knew it wouldn’t be cloying and cute. Koresh and his dancers aren’t blind to the notion that love isn’t all hugs and kittens—it’s hard work, it’s conflict and resolution, it’s an ever-shifting dynamic of power and trust. A square stage space, elevated no more than a half-inch, was situated at the far west corner of the atrium by the temporary (and awesome) Glackens gallery. Unfortunately, sight lines were pretty brutal, so those of us who arrived and found seats 15 minutes before the first movements were craning and straining a little to see. But it was their first time attempting such a collaboration, and Koresh said he learned his lesson. They’ll do it even better next year, he remarked. As for the dance itself, it was pretty typically Koreshian: physical, elegant, poignant, powerful, sensual and universal.

Most memorable moment: When I got to get up really close for some photos. The way the light danced on the walls as bodies shifted through spotlights was dazzling. They worked in pairs and then with company-wide moments of 10. Everything felt very soft, and muted but with a rawness that was slightly challenging. Love, as a concept to be danced, has a lot of room for corniness, but that was all checked at the Barnes’ marvelously grand doors.

Scene stealer: Probably the duet pictured above between Joseph Coker and Krosa Montrone. They were just so tight, clean and dramatic—but not overly so.
S.J.'s Steve Croce embraces gender-bending role

SALLY FRIEDMAN, For the Courier-Post 211 pm, EDT March 12, 2015

Conventional wisdom would suggest that there's nothing funny about divorce. In fact, it can be brutal, destructive and downright painful.

But somehow, the peaks of laughter were practically bouncing off the walls at the Penn's Landing Playhouse, where "The Divorcees Club" is on stage.

If irreverence is not your style, then this is the wrong play to see. But if you love the hilarity that erupts when three vastly different divorcees start living together (with one of questionable gender) more on that soon) then this is a good choice.

As the play opens, Bethany (Aileen Goldberg) is on the phone with a friend discussing her recent divorce, and her need for roommates.

And just as she is expecting the first potential apartment-sharer, in 'she' walks.

But this 'she,' be-wigged as she may be, is a buty, noisy, tempestuous 'he' and the audience knows it, although poor bewildered and ultra-proper Bethany never does acknowledge it.

The gender-bending role belongs to South Jersey's own Steve Croce, an actor with a long list of credits both here and abroad. This time he's playing the pivotal role of poor divorced Bridget, a native of a small South Carolina town. All braven and energy, Bridget is — well, Bridget.

But it takes a gifted actor to pull it off, and Croce has that gift.

"I loved the possibilities of the role as soon as I heard about it," says Croce, a Pennsauken resident and graduate of Camden Catholic High School.

"I wasn't one of those kids who was smitten with theater. I was more interested in wrestling," he explains. "I went on to get a degree at Stockton in Environmental Science, even though I had opened myself to theater in college.

When a New York agent happened to see Croce perform in a Stockton student showcase, he predicted that this young man could have a bright future on the stage. "I never got his name or his card, but he knew something I didn't at the time."

So Croce went on to work in a chemistry lab in New York City, and to tinker with theater. His science career wasn't exhilarating, but the theater was, and early on, this South Jersey man was grabbed up for local productions. He also began taking classes at several prestigious New York acting schools, and the roles came in a steady, pummeling stream.

Then he was invited to do an acting gig in Paris — just a brief one. He ended up spending almost two decades there, and it was in Paris that one of the creators of "Le Clan des Divorcees," the French version of what has now become a local sensation.
"This production is actually very altered from the French version, and people, especially women, really relate to both the humor and the pathos of divorce," says Croce, whose aunts steal many scenes in the show.

On stage with Croce is another South Jersey performer, the sexy blonde bimbo-bombshell, Marie, played by the gifted Kellee Cooper. Her theatrical resume includes numerous roles, from works by Tennessee Williams to David Ives. Along with live theater, Cooper, a native of Akron, also has done film and improv.

She began singing around the house as a young child, and got early encouragement not just from her parents, but also from Carolyn Head, an inspirational drama teacher at Timber Creek High School.

"Ironically, I didn't pursue theater at Rowan University, but concentrated, instead, on getting a degree in education," says Cooper. "But soon, I missed theater and I made it my business to work with various community groups."

On one memorable occasion, she even got her father, a lineman with an electric company who had never appeared on a stage, to jump into a role with his daughter in "The Sunshine Boys" at the Ritz Theatre. "It was just an amazing experience for both of us," says Cooper.

Amazing, too, has been her immersion in this comedy romp at the Penn's Landing Playhouse. "I absolutely love it. It's definitely one of the most fun experiences I've had on any stage."

It all came in a great rush for Cooper.

"I had two days to prepare for the audition, recalls Cooper whose 'day job' consists with her 52 theatrical performances to date. She is a scheduler for a veterinary hospital in Old City, and somehow manages the daunting juggling act.

Within just a couple of days, she learned that she had landed the role, and it's been a delightful, if demanding existence, ever since.

The role was actually tailored for Cooper since she plays a 'Jersey Girl' in the production. And that's a source of local pride for Kellee, who gets her share of laughs as a zesty, naive husband-seeker.

Goldberg, who plays a well-off, well-bred socialite, adds a note of calm to the chaos, and is a perfect foil to the two more turbulent actors.

This production, with its South Jersey talent heft, still allows for some poignant moments when the loneliness and sadness of divorce surface.

There's also plenty of evidence, amid the humor, that there is a connection, at least among divorcees, that there is indeed life — and hope — after divorce.

For more information

The Divorcees Club continues at the Penn's Landing Playhouse, 211 South Columbus Blvd., Philadelphia, through March 22. Tickets from $25. Call (855) 445-7450 or thedivorceesclub.com
Kellie Cooper and Stephen Croce play two of three divorced women in their play, "The Divorcees Club." The comedy features local actors casted as "divorced women" living together.

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