

Long Beach Playhouse turns out the lights for a real thriller

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Long Beach Playhouse is offering a truly thrilling production of Frederick Knott's 1964 play *Wait Until Dark*.

Susy Hendrix is a recently blinded Greenwich Village housewife who becomes the quarry of a trio of hoodlums who are after the heroin which is concealed inside a musical doll that her husband Sam brought back from Canada as a favor to a woman who has since been bumped off. The three con men try to persuade Susy that police have implicated Sam in the murder and that she should give up the dolly in order to protect him. Susy refuses to reveal its whereabouts and, with the aid of her 12-year-old neighbor Gloria, she gradually figures out the clever hoax and is eventually able to use her blindness to her advantage, only when darkness falls.

It is these obstacles— Susy's blindness, her being a woman, Gloria's youth— in opposition to the wile and brutishness of the con artists that make *Wait Until Dark* so gripping. The odds are really stacked against Susy, but her resourcefulness is her potential salvation from the criminals who scam their way into her apartment while she is there alone.

Lovely and sympathetic, Kate Woodruff makes a perfect Susy for this story. She's pert and smart, and she strikes just the right balance between being the innocent victim that we root for and the clever, headstrong urban woman that we need her to be.

As the leader of the pack, Anthony B. Cohen imbues his character Roat with the sinister qualities you'd expect from such a goon, but he's also chilling when he, as Roat, adopts different voices and accents to assume various personae in his effort to trick Susy into buying the swindle. They and the rest of the cast really make use of the set and props, to the point that, at times, in pitch black, it seems that someone is actually being beaten or killed; there's such a ruckus onstage when the lights go out, including those where the audience sits, that it seems the footlights will come up on an actor who's literally broken his proverbial leg.

That set, as well as the costumes and props, are authentic to the time period without being distracting.

Wait Until Dark is the kind of play that is more entertaining than literary. In fact, seeing this production, with its engaging cast (with no one being a weak link) and adept use of lighting and pacing, feels more like watching a good movie than a night out at the theater. And that's okay. It's fun to be scared, and it's amusing to watch an underdog of a heroine, left to her limited devices, get the best of the bad guys. In the dark.

Wait Until Dark is playing through July 12 at the Long Beach Playhouse, located at 5021 E. Anaheim St. Tickets are \$18 for general admission, \$15 for seniors and \$10 for students. For more information, call (562) 494-1014 or visit www.lbph.com.