

GRUNION GAZETTE DOWNTOWN GAZETTE
GAZETTE NEWSPAPERS

OFF BROADWAY by James Scarborough
Published June 12, 2008

“WAIT UNTIL DARK” REVIEW

Director’s Clever Spin Compelling

Director’s Clever Spin Compelling

With “Wait Until Dark,” at the Long Beach Playhouse Studio Theatre, under the direction of Carl daSilva, Frederick Knott’s intention couldn’t be more obvious.

He puts a clever spin on what could have been an otherwise ho-hum Maltese Falcon-esque mystery and turns it into a compelling story of murder and deceit. His resolution is both unexpected and reminds us that physical handicaps are but in the eyes of the beholder.

Jesse GrothOlson’s set design, as it should, is a little claustrophobic and difficult to navigate say, should the lead character be blind. A staircase takes you down into the living room of a modest Greenwich Village basement apartment. To go from the kitchen to the bedroom/bathroom you have to cross the breadth of the living room.

Suzy Hendrix (Kate Woodruff, magnificent, of which more later), is married to Sam (Jim Felton). She lost her vision in a car accident. He’s a photographer (one side of the set has his dark room; the set and story abound with references to light and dark, hence the title). A woman cons him to carry a doll across the border from Canada. The doll contains heroin (the play’s set in 1964; hence the not-startling fact that its street value was all of \$50,000).

The woman gets murdered not far from the apartment and thence begins the scam. A couple of ex-cons, Mike Talman (Mike Jensen) and Sergeant Carlino (Walter DuRant), under the watch of current-con Harry Roat Jr. (Anthony Cohen), plot to retrieve the doll and its contents. Clearly their ends justifies their means and thus our concern ratchets up exponentially when it’s clear that blind Suzy is going to go up against a trio of thugs who will stop at nothing.

With the help of her teenage neighbor Gloria (Tara Lynne Barr, I trust we’ll be seeing more of her), Suzy manages to not just survive a dangerous moment but kills a killer and chases off the other two.

Lighting by Andrew Vonderschmitt’s was important to the story.

In the second act Suzy has cleverly removed the fuses so Roat (and the audience) sees the world exactly as she and Amy Winehouse see it: a Fade to Black.

The blackout lasts a little longer than necessary — we also remain in darkness a few long moments after the show ends — but this balances out the tech glitches when the lights came on a few times during the performance.

With her mannerisms, her movements, and especially her face (it radiated with prior visual knowledge of the world), Woodruff was excellent (as an actress, as a positive role model) in her portrayal of blind Suzy.

Knott has written a story that resonates on several levels. It's pure entertainment (well enacted, here) but it's also a lovely commentary on how often we are in the dark, sighted or not.

Performances are at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays with 2 p.m. matinees Sundays. The show runs until July 12.

Tickets are \$10-\$18. The Playhouse is by 5021 E. Anaheim St.

For more information, call 494-1014 or visit www.lbph.org.