

Shimerman makes his character's gentle reticence compelling via myriad subtle details, and McShane deftly imbues his boisterous role with an underlying sadness. Brochtrup is an ideal Coward lead, serenely bitchy, while Sorvari excels as the wildly giddy Hester. Pickles is superb as Xenia, getting the maximum humor from every line. "Dancing" is the only one-act that comes off as somewhat dated, but Chase is very good as the cool-even-when-impassioned Coward heroine. Schmidtke makes his amazingly forgiving character believable, which is an admirable feat, and Byrd is bluntly amusing as the appalled Clara.

Potter gives the best perf of the evening as the casually treacherous Leonora, a mixture of chilly resolve, lust and finally self-disgust that creates an all-too-human portrait. Holt is her equal as the unfortunate Barbara, looking as though she may come apart from sheer nerves at any moment. Burke is properly anguished and brutal as the unfaithful husband. Doukas is hilarious as the multitasking Piggie, often holding two conversations simultaneously, and Kitty Swink is woozily great as her drunken friend Clare.

William Ludel's direction of "Chamber" and Michael Murray's helming of "Hands" similarly keep the comedic anarchy bubbling along without collapsing into chaos -- both impressive balancing acts. Murray's work on "Dancing" is fine but can't make the piece seem realistic. Stephanie Shroyer's direction of "Astonished" is tightly paced, creatively staged and detailed in its levels of style and emotion. John Iacovelli's sets are basic but effective, and A. Jeffrey Schoenberg's costumes are lush.

Sets, John Iacovelli; costumes, A. Jeffrey Schoenberg; lighting, Jose Lopez; sound, John Zalewski; musical director, Matt Goldsby; production stage manager, Young Ji. Opened Oct. 27, 2007. Reviewed Nov. 3. Runs through Dec. 23. Running time: 2 HOURS, 45 MIN.