

A CurtainUp Los Angeles Review **Tonight at 8:30, Part II, Come the Wild**

By Laura Hitchcock

*I want to die! If only I could die!— Laura If you died, you'd forget me. I want to be remembered.— Alec
—Still Life, filmed as Brief Encounter*

The second part of Noel Coward's *Tonight at 8:30* is stronger than the first dramatically.

The plays are set in 1936 when they were

written. Double cast by the seasoned members of The Antaeus Classical Theatre Ensemble, the evening begins with *Red Peppers*, a sardonic picture of a vaudeville team both on stage and back stage.

J. D. Cullum and Gigi Bermingham in the performance viewed were suave and feisty as the Peppers with Philip Proctor as the malicious Musical Director who plays so fast they fall all over themselves, Robert Pine as pompous inept theater manager Mr. Edwards and Angela Paton in a delicious turn as Mabel, a West End prima donna gone blowsy. The singing, under Stefan Novinski's nimble direction, evokes shades of Jimmy Cagney and will ring a bell with theatre artists in any era.

The Gows' house in *Fumed Oak* is inspired by Coward's own middle-class low-rent childhood. Robert Goldsby finds the anger and humor in this wretched family, including Josh Clark who scales a delighted character arc from henpecked husband to the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. Others in the cast include Laura Wernette as his bitter wife; Emily Eiden as obnoxious daughter Elsie, a wonderful gawky presence whose rage sometimes seems a tad over the top for the period; and Angela Paton, as Elsie's grandmother Mrs. Rockett who ranges with wild-eyed comic élan from doting grandmother to a woman determined to get her own way.

Still Life, immortalized on screen as *Brief Encounter*, has a poignance that makes it still resonate. Two strangers meet in a train station, Dr. Alec Harvey, played with warmth and dignity by Mirron Willis and Laura Jesson, a quiet housewife, played by Shannon Holt in a heart-felt performance that sometimes shades into the shrill. Although both are married with children they discover each has met the love of his/her life. The lovers' are mirrored by two other romances, middle-aged restaurant manager Myrtle (Anne Gee Byrd) and Station Master Albert (Josh Clark) as well as young working-class waitress Beryl (Angela Goethals) with shopboy Stanley (Ramon DeOcampo). They add welcome comic relief to the tragedy of the couple they call *Romeo and Juliet*. Stephanie Shroyer directs.

Family Album, in which a family gathers after the death of a patriarch to compare notes and reminisce, is the evening's slightest effort. Director Brendon Fox has plumped it up with some of Coward's beloved songs, ending with "Sail Away," which, with the skilled cast, give it a charm it never had. Matthew Goldsby provides the skilled musical accompaniment. John Iacovelli's sets and A. Jeffrey Schoenberg's costumes are true to the period, colorful and dramatic.

TONIGHT AT 8:30. PART II. COME THE WILD

Playwright: Noel Coward

Directors and Casts: **RED PEPPERS:** Director: Stefan Novinski. Cast: JD Cullum (George), Gigi Bermingham (Lily), Ramon DeOcampo (Alf), Philip Proctor (Bert), Robert Pine (Mr. Edwards), Angela Paton (Mabel). **FUMED OAK:** Director: Robert Goldsby. Cast: Emily Eiden (Elsie), Laura Wernette (Doris), Angela Paton (Mrs. Rockett), Josh Clark (Henry). **STILL LIFE:** Director: Stephanie Shroyer. Cast: Shannon Holt (Laura), Anne Gee Byrd (Myrtle), Angela Goethals (Beryl), Ramon DeOcampo (Stanley), Josh Clark (Albert), Mirron Willis (Alec), Ryan Spahn (Bill), JD Cullum (Johnnie), Emily Eiden (Mildred), Gigi Bermingham (Dolly). **FAMILY ALBUM:** Director: Brendon Fox. Gigi Bermingham (Emily), JD Cullum (Richard), Amelia White (Lavinia), Robert Pine (Jasper), Shannon Holt (Jane), Laura Wernette (Harriet), Josh Clark (Charles), Mirron Willis (Edward), Philip Proctor (Burrows). Accompanist: Matthew Goldsby

Set Design: John Iacovelli

Lighting Design: Jose Lopez

Costume Design: A. Jeffrey Schoenberg

Choreography: Kay Colebr Sound Design: John Zalewski

Musical Director: Matt Goldsby

Dialects: Tracy Winters

Musical Consultant: Nancy Dussault

Running Time: Three hours, one intermission

Running Dates: November 10-December 23, 2007, In repertory with Part I

Where: Deaf West Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Blvd, North Hollywood, Reservations: (866) 811-4111

Reviewed by Laura Hitchcock on November 18.