



Society : CYGNET PLAYERS  
Production : "CITY OF ANGELS"  
Date : 24 September 2011  
Venue : Putney Arts Theatre  
Report by : Stephen Macvicar

## Report

Thank you very much for inviting me to Cygnet Player's production of the excellent stage musical 'City of Angels' recently at Putney Arts Theatre. Thanks also to everybody who made me very welcome on the night itself

### Synopsis

As the curtain rises, Stone lies on a hospital gurney with a bullet in his shoulder and a lot on his mind. A tough private eye in the tradition of Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade, Stone also suffers from a bruised heart (owing to a weakness for beautiful women) and an empty wallet (he's too moral to take dishonest jobs). Stone flashes back to a week earlier, when his secretary-with-a-heart-of-gold, Oolie, ushered in a rich, beautiful woman named Alaura. Alaura claims she wants Stone to find her missing stepdaughter; against his better judgment he takes the case. And just as we're becoming intrigued, a man at a typewriter appears on stage, and the actors are suddenly backing up, "rewinding", and playing the scene with a few changes. The man, we discover, is Stine, author of popular detective novels starring Stone, one of which he is now adapting for his first screenplay. What we've seen comes straight from his imagination.

### Shortened Review for the NODA Website and Amateur Stage Magazine

A tough undertaking from Cygnet Players was rewarded with a very entertaining show. Many scene changes can slow this piece down but the Director and creative team worked hard to make these slick and seamless. The success of this show depends on the strength of its leading players both vocally and in drama to draw you in and I believed in and was impressed by almost every leading character

City of Angels is a show that I have enjoyed since I first saw it some twenty years ago. It is unfortunately seldom performed on the amateur circuit due to the complexities of staging and its perceived lack of box office appeal. Set in the glamorous, seductive Hollywood of the 1940's, "City of Angels" is a roller coaster ride filled with witty one-liners and evocative lyrics. The familiar "show within a show" theme is brought out again as the actors switch from relatives and acquaintances of Stine, the writer, to characters in his Private Investigator screenplay. Hopefully this very strong production will encourage others to tackle the piece as it is a thoroughly rewarding show for cast and audience alike. There are some fantastic character parts for both sexes added to a fabulous score which is sexy and powerful in equal measure.

Putney Arts Theatre was transformed into a split set to mirror represent the two worlds of the action with nicely created downstage left and downstage right office scenes. The film noir setting of the late 1940s is rarely seen on stage or screen these days and is difficult to re-create authentically. The filing cabinet, tables, typewriter etc immediately took us to the appropriate era. The eight piece band was nicely positioned upstage right as the music is integral to the show's success. Jimmy Powers

had his performance space upstage left and closed in flats complete with silver curtain created a fitting atmosphere to keep the pace moving without having to lug around sets for the many scene changes. As with *The Wedding Singer*, many of your youthful company will have very little or no knowledge of the world of the private detective with his thoughts being self-narrated and femme fatales out gold-digging. The alter ego is the world of the writer who creates the characters and the entire script for the screen. These types of shows were very popular on television during the fifties, sixties and seventies – the last of similar to type in the UK I believe was 'Shoestring'.

The opening montage was nothing short of excellent as the characters were introduced. In particular, I really enjoyed the vocals from the Angel City Four as this is a notoriously difficult piece of music with no hiding place. The action flowed nicely as we were introduced in turn to some very deep characters and I thought your consistently strong cast coped remarkably well with these complexities. 'What You Don't Know About Women' featuring Gabby and Oolie was fantastic as was the extremely witty 'The Tennis Song' with Stone and Alaura. Another great ballad 'Lost and Found' was skillfully delivered in a compromising costume by Mallory. Some welcome comedy was delivered by the Mexican policeman Munoz and his motley crew in 'All You Have to do is Wait' before my favourite number in the score completed Act One in the shape of 'You're Nothing Without Me' by the excellent Stine and Stone. The big numbers just kept coming in Act Two as the plot(s) unfolded. None bigger and better than the ironic power ballad 'Funny' delivered with controlled fortification by Stine.

Patrick Harrison and his fellow Production Team did a sterling job in achieving the extremely high standards they did. It was clear that a lot of thought had gone into this production with the staging and creative teams to overcome the many and varied scene changes but it all worked beautifully. Yet, in doing so, at no time did the scenes look particularly minimalistic or bereft of detail. Congratulations to Sarah Norton as Producer. This was indeed a production which required an outstanding amount of team effort. Joe Bunker was effervescent as Musical Director and with the talented band onstage they created a fantastic atmosphere. Much of the music is jazz and blues in flavour and even if that style is not quite your bag, you could not help but be impressed with the energy of this band. Jessica Green's choreography was tight and nicely stylised. The ensemble were always in unison it was all very pleasant on the eye.

Philippa Stone and her willing helpers were never able to relax and the Sound and Lighting technicians too, were kept extremely busy both in terms of workload and artistically in an attempt to keep the mood and the action flowing. The 1940's is a fairly difficult time to costume and provide wigs for but all outfits looked elegant and correct for the period. Plenty of trilbys, macs and braces were on show. The ladies too, looked great in their elegant, stylish dresses and when required to wear somewhat less, these outfits were equally appealing.

There are others of course who individually gave so much to the production and as an ensemble but there are too many to mention individually. The supporting ensemble and minor principals gave fine, lively performances but I have only written a few notes on the main principals who featured significantly, in order of appearance;

Stine – Alan Reiss – A tour de force for Alan in this performance. His acting was strong but in particular his vocals soared over Putney Arts Theatre. The highlights of the show for me were the warring duet between the two protagonists at the conclusion of Act One – "You're Nothing Without Me" and "Funny" – the Stine solo in Act Two.

Stone – Olly Medlicott – I enjoyed Olly's performance very much but in his striving for the correct accent we just lost some of his dialogue but there is no doubting he is leading man material.

As previously mentioned this show is tough to perform as most of the actors play double roles. This can sometimes be difficult but all lead performers carried their transitions off well. Not to be outdone, the leading ladies also shone brightly.

Oolie/Donna – Flo Nash - as the downtrodden secretary to Stine, Flo looked to be thoroughly enjoying the sharp wit required and gave everything to the role displaying good all round vocal and acting abilities.

Alaura/Carla – Annie Hayes – The ‘femme fatale’ part of Alaura Kingsley was beautifully played by Annie Hayes who is a new face to me. Annie Oozed sex appeal and with lovely vocal tone she stamped her mark on the part. I look forward to future roles.

Buddy/Irwin – Robin Clifford – The part of Buddy Fidler is as tough a character to portray as they come and I felt Robin made a really good fist of it. His delivery and comedy timing was just about right.

Gabby/Bobbi – Liz Sweetland – As nightclub singer and Stone’s ex fiancé, Liz sang her luscious ballad ‘With Every Breath I Take’ with plenty of feeling and tenderness.

Jimmy Powers – Tom Cane – The professional singer Jimmy Powers was nicely played by Tom, showing just about the right amount of ‘cheese’.

Lt Munoz/Vargas – Peter O’Donovan – Peter played this unlikeable figure with a smile on his face and his tongue firmly stuck in his cheek. He had his day during ‘All You Have to do is Wait’.

Mallory Kingsley/Avril Raines – Jess Bunker – Jess was scorching hot in the role of the young seductress Mallory. The evocative number ‘Lost and Found’ was beautifully acted and sung.

I would also like to mention the excellence of the Angel City Four (Helen Burgess-Bartlett, Jenny Kent, Nicola Roscoe and Toby Thorp) who clearly succeeded where many have failed before them and impressed with their vocal harmony. All sub principal roles added much to the production.

The A5 souvenir programme had a nice balance and layout. I’m guessing the vast amount of adverts would have helped to make your programme cost neutral. It contained lots of show and interesting society information as well as reasonable quality photos and biogs of the cast, which are always very welcome.

Once again thank you for inviting me to the Putney Arts Theatre and best wishes for your future productions.

I look forward to seeing you again in the not too distant future.

Kindest Regards

Stephen Macvicar  
NODA Rep  
London Area 3  
[steve.macvicar@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:steve.macvicar@hotmail.co.uk)