



A CurtainUp Los Angeles Review ***The Boarding House***

By Laura Hitchcock

Well, Miss Danch may provide you with plenty, perhaps even an overabundance of amusing conversation, but that kind of companionship scarcely resembles that of a marriage where there is an intimacy of expression which is singular. It's difficult not to desire it. — Mr. John

There's plenty of emotional debris in this 1945 Boston boarding house where two women have given up searching for their husband and brother, Dell, a World War II veteran who vanished after disembarking in New York. Ann Noble (*The Pagans*) has constructed a taut story whose diverse characters have absorbing and complex problems and histories, and Darin Anthony has directed it at Interact Theatre Company with respect for their individuality and a feel for realistic suspense that keeps the audience on the edge of their seats.

Without giving too much away, the Boarding House is run by Imogen (Alyss Henderson), sister of the missing man, assisted by his wife Sylvia (Amanda Troop opening night), dressed in the apron and head scarf of a slavey. This apparently was Imogen's role when Dell ran the Boarding House, once their family home. Sylvia's lot is lightened by the French lessons she gets from their boarder Mr. John (James Calvert opening night), a teacher and former French army officer. Another tenant, Lilah (Rebecca Tilney), chic and flaky, absorbed in her affair with a married man, brings lightness and loopiness to the gloomy scene.

A new tenant, Paul Avery (Matt Crabtree), a total klutz who may take one pratfall too many, turns out to be on a mysterious mission involving a search for his sister's missing man but is distracted by the chemistry blossoming between him and Imogen. There's a sixth character, The Man (Kelly Van Kirk), a huge fellow who alternates warmth and swing dancing with maniacal changes of mood in which he finds himself in another time and place.

Mr. John is in love with Sylvia and despises Lilah. He's so cruel to her one feels

Sylvia might be better off with The Man, dotty as he is. The Man is the center of a romantic triangle, giving all the characters romantic tangles to sort out. Sylvia's final motivation is unclear. The play, to its credit, has no pat endings. The characters' fates are realistic and one wonders where they will go from here.

Rebecca Tilney's delicate self-absorption makes the one-dimensional Lilah the spark of the night, holding the stage by more than her couture. Amanda Troop as Sylvia and Alyss Henderson as Imogen play out their conflicts well as the two passionate women of the house. Kelly Van Kirk is a looming powerhouse as The Man and Matt Crabtree overcomes the pratfalls in the script to create a portrait of a sincere and loyal brother. James Calvert has the stiffness of a French Army officer. This part is charmless and he finds the character's diffidence but not much more is created.

Joel Daavid's set has the sepia tones of the period and the warm shabby feel of a family home, softly lit by the excellent J. Kent Inasy. The only flaw in the lighting scheme occurred at the beginning of the second scene when The Man and Sylvia at stage front were left in shadow. Costume Designer Sherry Linnell found perfect period costumes, outdoing herself in the elegant wardrobe paraded by clothes horse Lilah.

The space Interact used this time in St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Hollywood is small but effective, with an outdoor patio, parking and a central location just a block from the Pantages which makes it another addition to the area's expanding arts scene.