

BACKSTAGE

Burn This

by Dave DePino

June 27, 2007

The weakest part of this production is Lanford Wilson's script. Award-winning or not, it isn't everyone's end-all, and it's certainly not his best. It plays like an old Tennessee Williams Southern lust-puppy, set a few decades ahead and several states northeast, complete with a Stanley, Blanche, et al.

Notable dancer-choreographer Robbie and his lover Dominick die in a freak boating accident, leaving Robbie's two ostensibly platonic roommates, Anna (Kathleen Parker) and Larry (Chad Borden), grieving. Robbie's family never bothered to see him dance and might not have even known he was gay. An elder, macho brother, Pale (Josh Stamberg), drugged-up and drunken, bursts on the scene late one night to retrieve Robbie's belongings. He manages to stir raw feelings plus add hateful, familial homophobia before kindly bedding the engaged Anna.

Opening-night passion ran lukewarm until Pale exploded onstage, at first seeming to be demonstrative and all over the board until one considers his coffees, liquors, drugs, and tight \$700 shoes in proper perspective. Then his emotional, incoherent frenzy seems perfectly apropos. We can almost feel Anna seeing Robbie in his brother's face as their long-awaited choreographed dance begins to take shape.

Though thuggish, Stamberg makes Pale likable, alternately flexing his muscles and crying on Anna's hair. Parker finds her footing after the wooing begins, ready to follow her dark knight into the what- or wherever. Poor Borden is stuck uttering a bunch of very stale, unfunny gayisms but does fine with his character after the honesty in the script begins to surface. And Kaufman acquits himself nicely in a thankless role. He, however, gets to look dashingly handsome and do nifty fisticuffs - special praise for fight choreographer Scott Cummins. Somehow director Darin Anthony manages to pull this all together into a not-half-bad production with an attractive patina of talent onstage.

Presented by Amalgam Theatre Company at Theatre Asylum,

6322 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood.

Thu.-Sat. 8 p.m. Jun. 22-Jul. 14.

(323) 960-4429. www.plays411.com/burnthis.