

“Burn This” Smolders at Theatre Asylum

Very often in the world of [theatre](#) low budget can be mistaken for true art, something about the closeness of the magic to the audience without all the glitz and glamour of a cast of thousands. However, there is never an instance where true art is confused with something that is just low budget. “Burn This,” written by Lanford Wilson and directed by Darin Anthony opened to a crowd of less than 60 people and true art was apparent from the dimming of the lights.

Opening at the Theatre Asylum in Hollywood’s “Theatre Row” on 6322 Santa Monica Blvd, “Burn This” has a cast of just four actors over the course of two acts but holds the audience in place throughout.

Following the death of a young [dancer](#) who was on his way to becoming one of the premier modern performers in the art world, Robbie dies in a strange boating accident with his partner Dominic. His roommates and best friends Anna and Larry have to go to the funeral with Anna mistaken as Robbie’s girlfriend and forced to spend the night only to learn that the family had no idea that Robbie was gay or a premiere dancer.

The two try to get on with their lives until one night they see Robbie’s older brother Pale again and their lives are changed forever.

The character of Anna, played by Kathleen Parker, had the challenge of under acting the emotional Pale, played by Josh Stamberg. Most actresses in theatre would be seen gesturing or emoting as their fellow [actor](#) went in to a sustained monologue (which Stamberg does beautifully) but Parker is smart enough to just stand.

Her performance is really a key to the play in that she allows herself to dissolve in to the New York loft where the play is set and allow the torturous, self-destructing older brother to flail around the small stage.

Stamberg, who played Lucas Scott on Aaron Sorkin’s latest show “Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip,” is an actor unlike many in today’s theatre world in that he has the ability to make the audience look around him.

Much talent is equal to an attention black hole in that the actor causes all of the audiences’ emotions to flow straight in to him but with Anthony’s direction there are always at least one or two different actors standing around him. Stamberg plays a pitch perfect desperation that can cause one to cringe when they hear

his cries.

During the play, the other two characters are Larry, Anna's friend and roommate played by Chad Borden, and Burton, Anna's love interest and boyfriend of a few years, played by Jason Kaufman. These two never have a scene in which they are allowed to step to the front but rather build a stable backbone for the play. In every rollercoaster there have to be smooth moments which allow riders to appreciate the highs and lows, without them the ride becomes too helter skelter.

Borden plays Larry as an acid-tongued gay man of the modern world who is equal parts witty and caring about what will happen to Anna. One of the more nuanced performances of the work is Borden's ability to stand in a scene and care with the way he stands, sometimes limp against a beam or slinking in to a chair around the action of Anna and Pale.

The audience is tempted sometimes to think that the three actors are simply waiting for Stamberg's Pale to enter again with another rant in his Jersey accent but when they look closely they will see that they are in fact the candle wick for Pale's fiery performance.

The Theatre Asylum does not boast the bravado of some of its contemporaries on Theatre Row or the larger sights and sounds of Sunset Blvd. What it does do well is welcome one in to the theatre world without much pretension, easily saying "This is a good show and we are doing because it is important to us. We hope you feel the same."

What it also does is house the best show in [Hollywood](#). "Burn This" begins with a flame out and smolders the entire way through.

Lanford Wilson's "Burn This" directed by Darin Anthony will keep you pinned to your seat in the Theatre Asylum. This dramedy hits the pitch perfect tones of grief and the redemption of a life that may have been wasted. With performances that will blow you away, this play is a must see for anyone that is looking for a connection again.

- Written by Joshua Manly