



REVIEW- DOUBLE INDEMNITY – SAN JOSE REP

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Admittedly, my extensive knowledge of Barbara Stanwick, Billy Wilder and film noir is lacking. I came into San Jose Rep's stage adaptation of *Double Indemnity* certainly familiar with the genre, but with virtually no prior knowledge of the plot or film specifics. On the one hand, this proved beneficial as it gave away nothing of the mystery and provided me a far cleaner slate with which to judge the play on its stand-alone merits. On the flip side of the coin, I was presented with the challenge of separating the play from the film which I think as a companion piece would have actually helped the play in many ways.

Rather than try to replicate the film or even noir exactly, this production feels very much like a Technicolor homage to the 1944 film and simultaneously to the noir genre and the very art of film itself. So how do you translate a well-known, highly stylized, 2D black and white cinema classic to the living, breathing, multidimensional hues of 21st century stage? Though the fundamental feel of the source was retained, I speculate a little something was lost in translation.

This show really shined when it came to the technical elements (and honestly, I'm rarely disappointed with the tech at the Rep.) The dissolves, fades, cuts and angles of film were masterfully incorporated into the scene and lighting design. Scenes changes sometimes transitioned seamlessly without pomp and sometimes intentionally played a grand participatory role in the action of the scene with gorgeous, ingenious fluidity. I'm an absolute sucker for a well utilized revolving stage and was impressed with the use in this production. That magic was put to good use and cast and crew deserve a bow for the coordination involved in making those changes go off without a hitch. Lights were fun, well synched and functional, nothing too gimmicky and consistent with the overall production feel. The sound design was a bit over the top for my personal taste (thunder claps galore and a Hitchcock-like audio montage) but was executed flawlessly none-the-less and when paired with the rest of the piece, certainly it made "sense."

A special shout out needs to be made to the costumer. Thank you for period specific under garments. Honestly, lingerie has come a tremendous distance over the years and I would have spat fire had I seen even a hint of modern cuts, support and colors on our leading lady. She spends a significant amount of time lounging in her unmentionables and while I wager the majority of males would not have been bothered one way or the other, I for one appreciated the consistent era representation.

As with the last San Jose Rep show, my disappointments were small, but significant with regards to irritation level. Having invisible car doors with well-coordinated sound effects in one scene and not in others was baffling. Having a character with a physical phone prop on one side of the stage with another simply in a pool of light with no phone was a choice I disagreed with. Nit picky you say? Fair enough. Still, easily avoidable and they type of discrepancies that read as lost opportunities to raise the bar and in some cases just reach it.

For all these strong visual choices I was left wondering about some of the acting choices. Acting in the earlier days of film was....different. More melodramatic. Not worse necessarily, but certainly its foundation was not nearly as based in reality as it tries to be today and this is the one area of the play I thought just required too much forgiveness. That clichéd intonation, that put on sensuality, that staccato over the top cadence, that William Shatner dramatic pause,

it wares thin. Fast. I didn't WANT to feel like this was a "joke" but it didn't read real. If you can't see past it, it makes it harder to enjoy all the great things going on. I just kept thinking the stakes could have been significantly raised and the suspense genuinely maintained if the acting wasn't so forced to type. This probably won't present a problem for fans of the film as it probably relates closer to capturing that style, but for me the storytelling took a hit when I KNOW (having seen those actors before) they could have been more authentic. Additionally, the double casting of the ensemble proved a bear. expecting me to blindly accept I wasn't looking at the same guy that was just killed presented me with one more area to suspend my belief and ultimately, making me work too hard as an audience member.

In the end, *Double Indemnity* could totally be your next guilty pleasure and you needn't feel too guilty, for all my gripes there's plenty it has going for it. Perhaps just knowing better what to expect going in will certainly increase your enjoyment of it. This is a strange little cookie of a show, entertaining and certainly beautiful to look at with genuine moments of real thrill folded in. A deserved 3 1/2 out of 5 jewels in the tiara for the parts that make up the whole. [*Double Indemnity* plays through February 5th at San Jose Repertory Theatre in Downtown San Jose.](#)