

# My Cultural Landscape

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## Once More With Feeling

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"Noir, for me, is a fantastic journey into a morally featureless universe. In the moral definition of the world, good people and bad people, moral absolutes are hugely blurred in noir. Noir generates a tremendous amount of fear, pleasurable fear, about being waylaid in the dark, about being destroyed by people who supposedly care about you. Noir has a brilliant way of bringing forward and amplifying those emotional forces, those anxieties that people struggle with daily. I see noir fundamentally as [melodrama](#), but with one great difference. You have all the devices of melodrama: mood heightened by music, [cliffhanger](#) situations, and suspense. If we're able to do it right, it will be both an entertaining and, dare I say it, philosophical journey for the audience."



Carrie Paff and John Bogar in *Double Indemnity*  
Photo by: Chris Bennion

Unfortunately, this adaptation of *Double Indemnity* suffered the same fate as last year's musicalization of [Armistead Maupin's Tales of the City](#) by [American Conservatory Theatre](#). A story that worked brilliantly in print (both were originally published in [serial format](#)) as well as on film felt remarkably uncomfortable in its attempt to make a successful transition to the stage.

Much of this has to do with the style of writing and direction. The sexual [innuendo](#) which works so well in print and onscreen feels clumsy and labored onstage. The characterization of Nettle, an office secretary played by [Jessica Martin](#), seemed almost cartoonish.

Despite [Thomas Lynch's](#) fluid set (which made frequent use of its turntable) and [Annie Smart's](#) stylish period costumes, *Double Indemnity* never really achieved liftoff. Casting was strong, with [John Bogar](#) as a very masculine Walter Huff, [Carrie Paff](#) as a sultry, scheming Phyllis Nirlinger, and Jessica Martin as Phyllis's stepdaughter, Lola.



Carrie Paff and John Bogar in *Double Indemnity*

Photo by: Chris Bennion

With two strong actors playing the leads, I was surprised to see the ever-versatile [Mark Anderson Phillips](#) steal the show as Jackson (the man who almost ruins the murder coverup), Norton (the head of the insurance company), and Nino (Lola's smarmy boyfriend who starts shacking up with her stepmother). Other than economy, I'm not sure what was gained by having [Richard Ziman](#) double as the victim (Mr. Nirlinger) and the detective who solves the murder (Barton Keyes).

For a [genre](#) in which music should play a key role in building suspense, [Adam Stern's](#) score was surprisingly innocuous. Coupled with the fact that too many laps around a turntable can weaken a production, San Jose Rep's world premiere never really seemed to find its mark.