

# VINCE KEENAN

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## Theater: Double Indemnity

Thursday, November 17, 2011

The biggest surprise about [ACT Seattle](#)'s world premiere of the adaptation of James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* was finding [excerpts from my Noir City interview](#) with playwrights David Pichette and R. Hamilton Wright and director Kurt Beattie in the official program. If you want to know how the creative team approached bringing Cain's novel to the stage while dealing with the long shadows cast by [Billy Wilder's landmark film](#), then join [the Film Noir Foundation](#) and get yourself a subscription to the magazine. (Or you can wait for *Noir City Annual #4*, coming out early next year. The interview will be included.) I attended the play last night in the company of FNF honcho [Eddie Muller](#), whose full review will appear in the next issue of *Noir City*. Until then, you'll have to make do with my thoughts.

It's a good show, a truly theatrical experience that is also faithful to Cain's book right up to its baroque ending. (The plot in brief: insurance agent meets femme fatale, they off her husband, recriminations follow.) The production is inventively staged, making smart use of the theater's space as the story unfolds as a series of memories in the mind of its doomed protagonist. The sequence depicting the murder, including both car and train travel, is particularly thrilling.

The cast is uniformly solid. John Bogar makes a brash and confident Walter Huff, the salesman who has to sell his ideas to himself first. Richard Ziman shines in double duty as the ill-fated husband and Keyes, Huff's boss. Ziman comes up with a gleeful slant on the character that never draws parallels with Edward G. Robinson's brilliant performance in the film.

The script could have used more of the framing device established in the opening scene, with Huff on a boat making his escape. Whenever the ship's rail reappeared, I thought, "Oh, right." There isn't much sexual chemistry between Bogar and Carrie Paff, who plays Phyllis, which may be deliberate; as Muller and I discussed after the show, sex ultimately doesn't matter in Cain's story, which is about two broken people bent on doing wrong who, once they meet, bring out the worst in each other. What the script does maintain in spades is the queasy, relentless inevitability of the novel. *Double Indemnity* runs at ACT through Sunday, and the production moves to the [San Jose Repertory Theatre](#) in January.