

JC'S THEATRE SPOTLIGHT – Double Indemnity

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JC Douglas

Friday, June 2nd 2017 - 11:28 pm

TITLE: *Double Indemnity*

VENUE: Pond Playhouse, Halifax

COMPANY/EVENT: Theatre Arts Guild

DATES: June 1 - 24, 2017

SYNOPSIS: Insurance salesman Walter Huff calls at the home of Herbert Nirlinger to renew his automobile policy. Mr. Nirlinger ain't home ... but the missus is. And once he'd met Phyllis, Walter's life will never be the same. Sparks fly, and a murderous plot is hatched. Manipulation, treachery, deceit, all part of the *film noir* style of the 1944 motion picture that made Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* a pop culture classic. So what that in order for Mr. Nirlinger's new life insurance policy to cash out twice the payoff ("double indemnity"), his death would have to take place on a train ... Walter and Phyllis are determined to make it happen.

HIGHLIGHT: As Walter is dragged further and deeper into a plot he stumbled into by chance in the first place, he begins to sense an imminent danger. "And what happens next will blow your mind ..." as Phyllis asserts complete control over the situation. Even if I warn you, you won't be prepared for the shock when it happens.

QUOTE: "That's all it takes ... just one drop of fear to curdle love into hate."

SHINING STARS: Ellen Oldford shines as Phyllis Nirlinger, a character so psychotically dangerous, the American Film Institute ranked her the #8 movie villain of all time (as played by Barbara Stanwyck). Oldford brings appropriate doses of sleazy sex appeal and cunning serial killer to the role. She's so believable, I felt a nervous anxiety when I met her in the lobby after the show. Terry Coolen as Walter Huff makes a worthy stooge when Phyllis requires an accomplice for her murderous aspiration. Their chemistry works, to be sure. But in a note no director would give an actor, I believe Coolen would be well-served to revisit the lead male as played by Fred MacMurray in 1944. Just to borrow a little of the cocksure swagger and deadpan delivery: "I'm crazy 'boutcha, baby," with not a drop more expression or emotion than was absolutely necessary to sell the line. One of the keys to the *film noir* charm was the stylized dialogue. As an homage I'd have liked the TAG production to lean a little harder on such devices to really bring the silver screen to the stage.

WHY YOU SHOULD SEE THIS: If you've never seen the film, TAG gives you a credible taste of *film noir* onstage. If you have seen the movie, Director Nick Jupp assures me that this production's ending is more true to James M. Cain's original book than Wilder's motion picture. Jupp's set design and Gayle Hughson's lighting design take centre stage, with classic "vertical blind" interior lighting and fun "driving and talking" effects evoking the old B&W films of yesteryear. In a Spring when so much of the motion picture box office is relying on throwback appeal, opt instead for some "way back" camp and a sexy, dangerous night of theatre.

Photos by Bruce Goodick.