

LUNT AND FONTANNE PROBED SUPERBLY IN “TEN CHIMNEY’S”

Chris Curcio, February 26, 2011

Although I never saw the great Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne act on stage, I feel like I know them from the superbly staged and magnificently written “Ten Chimney’s.” The world premiere play’s title comes from the Lunt’s Wisconsin retreat where the pair spent summers crafting the next season’s play.



Anna Bullard & Steve Hendrickson

Commissioned by Arizona Theatre Company, “Ten Chimney’s” is playwright Jeffrey Hatcher’s inspiration to give contemporary audiences an insightful glimpse into the Lunt’s and the theatrics of their lives. Hatcher’s marvelously wry and witty view takes place in the summer of 1938 when they were preparing Chekhov’s “The Sea Gull” with an acting company that included Sidney Greenstreet and marked Uta Hagen’s debut.

Beyond David Ira Goldstein’s glistening staging and a marvelous acting company, praise must start with the superb physical production. It beautifully recreates Ten Chimney’s pool area, studio, and some of the wooded grounds. The characters wear fashionable 1930s frocks followed in the second act by the major fashion changes that occurred in 1945 when the play has the characters reflect back on the earlier production.

With this couple and their acting ensemble, over-the-top theatrics greet every detail of the production and their lives as these egocentric people use their craft

and language command to face everyday issues resulting from the play plus Lunt’s mother Hattie and his half sister and brother who run the estate. The play’s drama is heightened by Lunt’s fascination with Hagen and Fontanne’s fear for her marriage. It’s a true situation dramatized radiantly by Hatcher. His dialogue glistens with funny, insightful repartee as these people point wicked slams at each other. The distrust between Lunt’s domineering mother and the slights felt by Lunt’s siblings create never ending plot turns and twists.

Goldstein directs with his usual aplomb and elegance that befits these characters. Suzanne Bouchard Fontanne glimmers as she sashays around the stage, delivers dialogue with sophisticated venom while trying to conceal Fontanne’s fearful jealousy. No less brilliant is **Steve Hendrickson’s**

Lunt, who’s a glib, accomplished actor with underlying and groundless fears of inadequacy. Michael Winters has a field day with hefty Greenstreet who struggles with a wife plagued by mental illness. Linda Stephens’ Hattie drips hatefulness toward Fontanne as she masks frustration at her failed acting career. Anna Bullard’s Hagen shimmers as her career begins and as she uses her attraction to Lunt to her benefit. As Lunt’s siblings, Naomi Jacobson is the stalwart Louise who keeps everything on track while Marcus Truschinski portrays doesn’t care brother Carl.



Suzanne Bouchard & Steve Hendrickson