

REP's 'Little Foxes' wows the audience

Skillful production mines truth from classic melodrama

Written by

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THEATER REVIEW

WHAT: Lillian Hellman's "The Little Foxes"

WHEN: Through Oct. 15. Thursday, Oct. 13, and Fridays and Saturdays, 7:30 p.m. Matinees, 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sunday, Oct. 9

WHERE: Roselle Center for the Arts, 110 Orchard Rd., Newark

TICKETS: \$19 to \$25, discounts for students, seniors, UD faculty and staff

INFORMATION: 831-2204 or www.rep.udel.edu

"Cynicism is an unpleasant way of saying the truth" is one pronouncement in "The Little Foxes," Lillian Hellman's iconic, cynical and always contemporary dope-slapping of American greed and other moral dissemblings.

The highly combative, husky-voiced Hellman's most popular drama is now having a husky, muscular and somewhat surprisingly comedic gilt-edged turn by the University of Delaware's Resident Ensemble Players.

The production's clear-sighted director, Leslie Reidel, has trolled this carefully crafted 1939 melodrama for the truths within its often bombastic verbiage.

Among the many salient elements at work are Reidel as "the [playwright's] advocate," and this 10-member troupe's being so well-tuned to one another.

The players know when to do the loud and ugly of the rapacious small-town merchants, the horrible Hubbards of turn-of-the-century southwest Alabama, and how to grab us with the play's quieter, almost magical moments.

Almost magical: The fragile, sensitive, morally sound and appropriately named Birdie Hubbard, who drinks to anesthetize her pain, and owns the front third of the last act. As she did with her Laura Wingfield in the REP's "The Glass Menagerie," Carine Montbertrand plays Birdie with exquisite care and grace.

Montbertrand and the exacting Michael Gotch, as the oily, three-quarter-witted Leo Hubbard, provide almost too much comic relief.

Elizabeth Heflin is a powerhouse as Regina Hubbard Giddens. Mic Matarrese and Stephen Pelinski, as the avaricious Hubbard brothers, are a delicious contrast to Hellman's three other morally upright characters, played by Erin Partin, Jasmine Bracey and Dante Fitzgerald.

Steve Tague gives fullness to two distinctive characters.

The production glows with Nick Embree's set, Andrea Barrier's costumes and Eileen Smitheimer's lighting and sound design.

As the final curtain descended opening night, one audience member succinctly summed up this REP offering: "Wow!"