

REVIEW by RICH BOROWY, LINEAR CYCLE PRODUCTIONS (online)

Art Shulman's DOUBTING THOMAS makes its appearance at North Hollywood's Secret Rose Theatre. It's a comic drama about a man who receives an inheritance from the father he never knew, and shortly meets the down and out man who knew his late dad in more ways than one.

The story finds John (Ted Ryan) an unemployed ad man seeking work, receiving word that his father Woodrow had recently died in an accident, and left his only child a small fortune. John's dad departed from the family when he was a toddler and thus, never got to know him. He was only identified through a debit card on his person, and the attorney traced John as his sole heir.

John and his family, consisting of his spouse Marilyn (Nancy Van Iderstine) who writes children's books, and their teenage son Dylan (Adam Simon Krist, alternating with Ian Hamilton) going through his growing pains, are thrilled in receiving the money they desperately need. But before John can collect his inheritance, he must buy a park bench, since his father requested in his will that he is to be buried while prone on the bench! (He was in a homeless state, and his bench served as his "home".) While at the park looking for a matching bench, John encounters another man lying on a bench, Thomas (Art Shulman), who was aware of Woodrow. John discovers something interesting about Thomas, a man who knew a lot about his deceased father. Could Thomas, a man who sports his share of intelligence by holding a library card and checking out eclectic reading material, really be his dad?

This play by playwright Art Shulman first appears as a comedy by asking whether John was going to receive a fortune from a vagrant? But its tone is more of a comic drama, or "dramedy" where the drama aspect isn't as heavy while its comical tones are lighter than expected. This method of story timbre actually works well since the basic theme is the sense of rebounding family ties that have been unbounded through circumstance. The dialogue is quick witted, brisk, and irons out the logic. (How did a homeless man gain access to a half a million dollars while living on the street like a bum?)

The cast of four, including the playwright as the "Doubting Thomas", interact well with each other from the humble opening to a conclusion that features a climatic twist to it all. Stan Mazin directs this piece as a tight production throughout.

With such a close stage setting, Chris Winfield's set design is rather simple, consisting of a living room representing John and Marilyn's humble homestead, and a city park scene where Thomas calls his abode. J. Kent Inasy provides the lighting design, with Steve Shaw providing the audio effects and design.

Art Shulman, a local playwright based in the San Fernando Valley, has created a collection of plays over the years that range from light comedies to serious dramas. Many of these works have played in regional theaters within the Los Angeles area, and a selection of them have also been previously reviewed by this writer. This latest stage piece blends these two genres into a work that showcases a mix of humor and conflict with the right amount of sentiment added.

DOUBTING THOMAS is a real crowd pleaser that has its genuine moments. And there's no doubt about that fact!

*DOUBTING THOMAS, performs at the Secret Rose Theatre, 11246 Magnolia Blvd. (off Lankershim Blvd.), North Hollywood, until June 21st. Showtimes are Friday and Saturday nights at 8:00 PM, and Sunday afternoons at 2:00 PM.*

*For reservations and for more information, call (818) 465-3213, or via online at <http://www.DoubtingThomasPlay.com>*