



Stolen Chair **On STAGE**

www.stolenchair.org

KILL ME LIKE YOU MEAN IT

Reviewed by Stanley Hall- January 5, 2007

UNITED STAGES

From its first murderous moments, Kiran Rikhye's *Kill Me Like You Mean It* is a clever, high-styling treat. Sultry live saxophone heralds the arrival of the archetypical noir puzzle—the murder of a leggy redhead.

Private investigator Ben Farrell (Cameron J. Oro) is led on a dizzying rollercoaster of false leads and misdirection by a zany roster of unusual suspects. They include a desirous publisher, Lydia Forsythe (Alexia Vernon); a sex-trapping temptress, Vivian Ballantine (Liza Wade White); and her Howard Hughs-like brother, millionaire and author Tommy Dickie (played by, er—Tom[my] Dickie), who writes a serial crime novel. What makes his potboiler so compelling is that the fictional murders he pens turn into reality. Gumshoe F[a]rrell's problems become sobering as he discovers the murder of himself written in an upcoming Dickie crime segment.

The story that ensues is a fast-paced rollercoaster ride filled with just the right fantastical ingredients to make this absurd play hilarious. The able ensemble deliver lines both reflective of the detective film noir of yesteryear and the screwball comedies of the 1930s. Mr.

Oro does a terrific job of capturing the comically deadpan noir-everyman Ferrell. Tommy Dickie, with his pencil-thin mustache, delivers the right amount of physical and verbal corkiness. Ms. Vernon's comic agility evokes comparison to Carol Burnett. Ms. White and Mr. Dingman notably round out the ensemble.

Playwright Kiran Rikhye has done her research, paying pitch-perfect homage to noir classics like *The Maltese Falcon*. Occasionally the play could benefit from an editorial nip and tuck but the decision to keep it intermissionless is a correct one—and Ms. Rikhye is truly a playwright to keep an eye on. The directing of Jon Stancato is a big standout in this production, whipping up the icing on this stylistically rich confection. Even the scene changes, which could be slightly quickened, are fun. Kudos to David Bengali and his unfolding set, taking an ordinary space and revealing its possibilities. Merav Elbaz's artfully rendered costumes provided pleasant splashes of time period and color.

One hopes this company will continue to define and perfect this genre of live performance. Evident by the sold out opening night house, The Stolen Chair Theatre is earning a well deserved following.