

April 8, 2004

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## REVIEWS

### PEG & GARRICK

at Little Fish Theatre Company

Reviewed by Shirle Gottlieb

In 1740s London, James Quin was the quintessential thespian and the star of Covent Garden. With a grandiose declarative delivery, roaring voice, and broad gestural style, his hallmark portrayal of Falstaff was famous throughout England. Then along came David Garrick (an educated upstart who upset his appellation) and Peg Woffington (a sharp Irish actress from a working-class family). Garrick believed that good acting should be naturalistic not bombastic, that actors should express realistic feelings and true emotions. Woffington wanted to perform female roles and "britches roles" to show off her versatility—as well as her fabulous legs. When the two iconoclasts meet in the home of John Rich, the owner of Covent Garden Theatre

Company (nicely played by Anthony Cohen), little do they know that in a year and a half they will change the face of English theatre. During the process, they will become tumultuous lovers both famous and notorious.

In this world premiere of an exciting slice of history, playwright Elaine Osio explores this historical landscape in her dramatization *Peg & Garrick*. Under the direction of John Ross Clark, the ensemble jumps through hoops, moving from one

fast-paced scene to another. Suzanne Dean is a knockout in her portrayal of Peg. We cannot imagine anyone performing this bawdy, spitfire, in-your-face actor with more fire, passion, or conviction. Also top-notch is Patrick Rafferty as Garrick, and although Rafferty seems much younger than Dean, it doesn't seem to matter (then or now) in the world of smoldering love. Serving as foils to the ill-fated pair are the supporting roles of James Quin (Rob Monroe) and George Anne Bellamy (Ella Carter), longtime members of the Covent Garden Theatre Company, whose interaction, downhill misfortune, and ultimate fate give dimension to Peg and Garrick's stormy relationship; and Lord Taafé (Theo Caldwell), Peg's first lover in London who issues an ultimatum: "Take your choice, me or the theatre."

From the very beginning, this volatile environment was threatened by Lady Burlington and her spoiled-little-rich-girl ward. Josephine Black is totally convinc-

ing as this arrogant aristocrat, a patron of the arts whose disapproval can destroy a theatre company. Samantha Figura is perfectly cast as her conniving niece, a coquette who knows how to get what she wants. Lisa Coffi designed the modest set, Janine Anderson painted the background, and Danny Truxaw did the lighting.

Although some of the scene changes seem abrupt and in need of transition, it may be because such a small space serves so many different locations. Pay attention to the subtext. Underneath the surface drama, *Peg & Garrick* addresses the iron-fisted control of the upper-class, the paralyzing effect of male dominance over women, the outrage of women who struggle to break free, and the price paid by anyone who dares to challenge the status quo.

*"Peg & Garrick," presented by and at the Little Fish Theatre Company, 777 Centre St., San Pedro. Fri.-Sat. 8 p.m. Apr. 2-24. \$12. (310) 512-6030.*



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