

Rope Left Me Hanging

REVIEW BY KRISTIN D'AGOSTINO

In deference to the 50th anniversary of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*, Theatre Factory has combined elements of this 1948 motion picture with a revised version of the original Patrick Hamilton play to offer up some maddeningly macabre melodrama.

Based on a murder which took place in Chicago in 1924, *Rope* is the gruesome story of a young Harvard graduate who is brutally killed by two of his colleagues. Brandon Shaw and Philip Morgan, gay lovers bound together by an obsession with the macabre, decide one day to commit the perfect murder. Driven by his belief that a "superior" intellectual mind need not bother with society's concepts of right and wrong, Brandon convinces Philip to assist him in ridding the world of an "inferior" person. Enter David Kentley, the doomed "Inferior," a casual acquaintance of Brandon's who is a corpse right from the first scene (not even allowed one line, poor stiff). Having completed the dirty deed, the killers drop David's body into an old trunk in the living room and bask gleefully in the afterglow of their vicious act. Then the real fun begins.

The two murderers throw a party to honor the success of their crime. They devise an exclusive guest list: only David's closest friends and family are invited. One by one guests arrive, gathering around the trunk which doubles as a casket and a dinner table. Hors d'oeuvres are served and everyone anxiously awaits the arrival of David, who seems to be running a bit late. (For kicks, Brandon jokes jovially throughout the dinner about morbid subjects, dropping hints about the crime to his nervous guests.)

Most actors are hard pressed to compete with the master of murder's cinematic gems, and Theatre Factory's killers can't quite hold a candle to their on-screen counterparts. While Craig Bailey (Brandon Shaw) and Brian Torstenson (Philip Morgan) deliver their characteristic performances — exaggerated acting by Bailey and reserved, deliberate

line delivery by Torstenson — juxtaposing their disparate approaches failed to strike a balance for me in this play. Stephanie deCarreau is spectacular as Janet, David's perky fiancée; she is vibrant and obviously comfortable in her role, enchanting the audience with natural grace. Matching her ability, is John D. Alexander as Rupert, whose middle initial could stand for Distinguished or perhaps Deft at pulling off the role as Brandon's old school teacher.

The play closes with an edge-of-your seat, action scene straight out of a Hitchcock movie. The audience is left feeling exhilarated, ears ringing with the sound of gunshots.

This play is reminiscent of all the campfire horror stories we were told as kids, like the one about the golden arm, or the bride who always wore a mysterious yellow ribbon around her neck. *Rope* is a chilling tale that gives the audience a brief, fearful glance into the mind of an inexorable killer, and, with a ticket price of only \$7.50, Theatre Factory's production offers play-goers an inexpensive thrill.

