

## What the Butler Saw

### Attendant to Matters Esthetica that Abound in the House of Culture

February 08, 2008

#### "Talk About the Passion," The Chance Theater, Anaheim, CA, by James Scarborough

Heart wrenching and fist clenching, Graham Farrow's riveting drama *Talk About the Passion*, directed by David Colwell for the Chance Theater, brims with anguish and despair, helplessness and inequity.

Colwell makes this a bleak secular exorcism of all our demons: depravity, slayer-of-innocence, greed, hypocrisy, and ambition. And let's not forget revenge. He predicates the production on a spiraling cycle of violence – A does harm to B. B in retaliation does harm to B at the behest of third party C – that explains much mortal woe.

It's the story of Jason Carroway (Casey Long) whose six-year-old son has been savagely abducted, raped, and murdered. Not only did Jason have to bear the guilt of his wife (she left him) and his friends and neighbors (they shunned and eschewed him), he now has to bear the fame and adulation the high-living still-in-jail murderer receives because of his best selling autobiography.

He takes out his rage on editor Evelyn Ayles (Laurel Feierbach), who was responsible for the book's publication. He barricades the door to her office and seeks his as yet undefined justice.

The acting is extraordinary. It's volcanic and adagio; it will make you lean forward in anticipation, lean back in relief. Not only do both actors capture the essences and nuances of their respective characters, they pull off difficult transformations at the end, all of which leads to a masterful, *thy-will-be-done* ending.

Colwell sets up the initial confrontation with a deft touch: Carroway, pure rage; Ayles, pure calculation.

Casey Long makes beleaguered father Jason Carroway a loose cannon, a sunk ship, a broken compass. His stooped posture and disheveled appearance speak oodles about his pain. So does the way he lumbers about the stage like a listing old growth tree about to fall. We have no doubt that at any moment he will strangle Evelyn, will slit her throat, will ignite the gasoline with which he doused her.

Laurel Feierbach gets us to despise editor Evelyn Ayles: her posh style, her walkway strut, her snooty phone manners, the way she initially pans and disses Jason's manuscript.

Then, because of a hatched plan (think of the premise of *Assassins*), the characters change. Jason regains a measure of hope, Evelyn a measure of compassion. I won't spoil the plan but it's a lulu; and it's conceived by Evelyn whose intention we first think is noble but who actually profits – so we think, so *she thinks* - from this act as well.

As a coda, in one of those stage moments that I don't know if Long can or will recreate in subsequent performances, he flashes a barely discernible smirk when Ayles realizes that she's been had. It's the exact same smirk that the Daniel Craig James Bond flashed when some terrorist thought he was blowing up a plane but was actually blowing up himself. Sweet!

Performances are 8pm, Thursday, 7pm, Sunday. The play runs until March 16. Tickets are \$22-25. The Theater is located at 5552 W. La Palma Avenue, Anaheim Hills. For more information call (714) 777-3033 or visit [www.chancetheater.com](http://www.chancetheater.com).

