

Mystery and Intrigue Carry 'Violet Sharp'

Based on original transcripts, William Cameron's play takes the investigation of the kidnapping of the 20-month old son of Charles Lindbergh and dramatizes the police action in the case. Lindbergh was a national hero, therefore worthy of the best investigation money could buy. When little Charlie was discovered missing from his crib on March 1, 1932, life as the Lindberghs knew it ended as the search for the child began. Because of the fame, and the wealth of the aviator, every tool in the government's satchel was enrolled in the search for the baby, and the quick arrest of his kidnapper. A waitress on the staff of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's wealthy mother's household, a young English woman, Violet Sharp (Meredith Bishop), becomes an easy first suspect. When questioned by hardbiten police investigators: the brusquely efficient and unsympathetic Harry Walsh, essayed by an exceptional David Hunt Stafford, and John McGrath, the 'good cop' in the good cop/bad cop duo (an engaging Shawn Savage), Violet comes up short on details of where she was on the night of the kidnap-

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ping. Repeated questioning intimidates Violet into creating a whole new set of "where I was's" on March 1, further entangling herself in a spider's web of suspicion that threatens her job, her health, and her intimate, but illicit relationship with the pompous butler, Septimus Banks (a right-on Daniel Leslie) who, it seems, may be the father of the child she's gestating in her...well, you get the picture.

Cameron's hard-driving dialogue sets the brilliant scenes of us-versus-them powerless 'little people' and power-driven authorities as Violet descends into desperation and hopelessness, incidentally sounding and seeming increasingly guilty as she swears to lie after lie, in order to save her truth which, as a person of her class and upbringing, she cannot admit to. Even with the Lindberghs in her corner, which itself incites suspicion (was there a hint of a 'relationship' between Charles Lindbergh and the young Violet?), she sinks deeper into a morass of lies and suspicion. Ms. Bishop is a pretty woman, and a convincing actress, but unfortunately cannot sustain an acceptable British accent. Her syllables drift from upper-class lady of the manor to scullery maid, with no barrier between the two. Since such a point is made about her upbringing and her social position, the intervention of a dialect coach could only improve the drama and the believability of the straits in which the poor girl finds herself. (Forgive me for I can't help being an import from that part of the world.)

Mad About Theatre



by Madeleine Shaner

Director David Coleman might consider also helping baby nurse, Betty Gow's (Christy Holy) supposed Scottish accent, which is almost incomprehensible in an otherwise sympathetic performance. Amy Lloyd, as commentator, the gossip Press, and the Lindberghs' private secretary, among several other roles, is suitably flamboyant and responsible as needed, but she does overplay her hand a bit. Christine Joelle, as Anne Lindbergh, is a formidable partner for her hero husband, an earnest

John T. Cogan. Rachel Kanouse, as Violet's sister, who mysteriously returns to England the day after the kidnapping; Adrian Pereira, Robin Leabman and Katy Minners round out the excellent cast.

This isn't the story of the Lindbergh baby's kidnapping, and makes no attempt to indicate word one about the convicted Bruno Hauptmann, who was executed for the hideous crime in 1936. This is very clearly the story of an innocent young woman who was goaded beyond understanding by the desperate authorities who were held up to scrutiny because of the fame and wealth of the baby's father. There's a good deal of melodrama built into Cameron's script; the opening scenes are brutish and short like flash bulb shots in a short advertising the play, setting up the expectation that the upcoming action will be hot and heavy. What follows, once the play settles down, is not necessarily what we were promised, but nevertheless proves itself as a personal drama that is quite effective, and definitely coherent. Coleman keeps things moving effectively on Jeff G. Rack's set, with Bill Froggatt's sound, Jeremy Pivnick's lighting,



Photo by Ed Krieger

Meredith Bishop, Shawn Savage and David Hunt Stafford star in "Violet Sharp".

and Caitlin O'Hare's costume design.

Theatre 40, The Reuben Cordova Theatre (on the campus of Beverly Hills High School, 241 Moreno Drive, Beverly Hills. (Free indoor parking and disabled access); in

repertory with "Double Indemnity", Monday through Saturday at 8:00pm, Saturday & Sunday matinees at 2:00pm, through March 12. Call (310)364-0535 for information or reservations, or visit www.theatre40.org.



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